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Volume 31, Number 1
January 2004

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEPALESE STUDIES

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Journal of
Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies
Tribhuvan University
Kirtipur, Nepal

CNAS

Contributions to Nepalese Studies

ISSN: 0376-7574

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Subscription Rates

	Nepal	India	Other countries
Single copy	NRs. 200/-	IRs. 200/-	—
One year	NRs. 375/-	IRs. 375/-	US\$ 50.00
Note: Air-mail postage is included.			

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- Khatri, Sridhar K. 2001. "Teaching of International Relations in Nepal." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 28:2, pp.139-154.
- Shrestha, Bal Gopal. 2002. "The Ritual Composition of Sankhu: The Socio-Religious Anthropology of a Newar Town in Nepal." Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Leiden University.

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A NEPALI ANTHROPOLOGIST IN AMERICA: REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK AMONG FRIENDS

Dilli R. Dahal

Introduction

Ill-defined as it may be, “fieldwork” is the hallmark of cultural anthropology. Within that discipline, nobody is regarded as having quite made the grade without some experience of fieldwork. The tradition is not new in anthropology, having begun with—or at least become institutionalized at the time of—British colonial expansions in Africa and Asia. One can even find important strains of it in the American work of Lewis Henry Morgan in the mid-19th century United States, though he is often regarded as a precursor who preferred to remain at home (White 1959; Trautmann 1987). Nevertheless, the tradition of long residence in the midst of the people of study, sharing their lives to varying extents but with methodological rigor and theoretical sophistication began only with the work of W. H.R. Rivers and others in the Torres Straits expedition of the Pacific around 1900. This tradition of fieldwork was followed and elaborated by the leading anthropologists of the 20th century, among them Bronislaw Malinowski with the Trobriand Islanders in the Pacific (1914-18), E.R. Radcliffe-Brown with the Onge of Andaman Island (1910-11), and Franz Boas with the Inuit of Baffin Island (1920-22).

From the beginning, many anthropologists have carried on a cottage industry of writing about their fieldwork experiences as a way of passing on accumulated “tricks of the trade” to the next generation of scholars (Becker 1998). Most of these writings, however, are focused on developing societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (for example, Chagnon 1968; Evans-Pritchard 1940). The situation is this: although there is an enormous amount of writing on the anthropological fieldwork experiences of westerners within developing countries, relatively little focuses on experience within developed

countries such as the United States of America. If one looks for accounts by non-westerners in such settings, the scarcity is especially striking.

There are many good reasons for this. They run from the history of anthropology itself, an imperial encounter in which non-westerners were always the studied rather than the studier. But there are also the cultural and institutional peculiarities of western societies and research environments that find themselves expressed in such issues as the notable preference for privacy among American families, the academic obstructions of university Internal Review Boards (IRB) carefully evaluating "human subject concerns," and the serious financial constraints to doing long term ethnographic research in some of the costliest places in the world.

In this essay, I want to provide an informal balance to this scarcity with brief reflections based on my own contrasting field experiences in the United States and Nepal. The American fieldwork experiences were gathered in connection with my involvement in a larger research project, "Work and Family Life in the Industrial Midwest," carried out through the Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life (CEEL), University of Michigan, during 2000 to 2001. The Nepali experiences, which I use mainly as a background to bring the American comments into relief, are recollected from my own fieldwork done in different parts of Nepal since 1973.

I want to describe my own cross-cultural experiences as a way of reflecting more generally on the issues that emerge and the problems encountered when a non-western anthropologist from a "developing country" conducts fieldwork in one of the most developed countries of the world. While doing ethnographic research in America, one must be prepared for problems that are both structural and cultural. At the same time, I have observed that even for Americans themselves, the difficulties of doing ethnographic research at home are increasing through the well-intentioned but crippling rigors of new human-subject research reviews and IRB requirements coupled with the changing values of American families over the last 40 years. It is interesting to contrast these institutional difficulties in American settings with the relative ease of conducting ethnographic work in developing countries such as Nepal and to speculate on how this imbalance resembles a continuation of the old imperial imbalances. Finally, I argue that a comparative perspective is ultimately the best way to understand social currents in any setting, especially where those issues have to do with household, family, and individual change.

Although I am mindful of making too grandiose a claim, I see my brief essay as a part of the lineage established by that early fieldworker in America, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who travelled the country in the 1830s and whose reflections on the American character from that era still hold their truths for today. It's hard to find, for example, a pithier comment on the American character than that which appeared in his chapter entitled "Why the Americans Are So Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity":

In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest circumstances that the world affords; it seemed to me as if a cloud habitually hung on their brow, and I thought them serious and almost sad, even in their pleasures.... It is strange to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare, and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it.... A native of the United States clings to this world's goods as if he were certain to never die; and he is so hasty in grasping at all within his reach that one would suppose he was constantly afraid of not living long enough to enjoy them. He clutches everything, he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications (de Tocqueville 2003).

My aims are less ambitious than de Tocqueville's, but I hope to provide the same informal mix of thoughtful comment and primary data. And I also hope to show that an outsider's point of view can open a new window onto the commonplace.

Ultimately, my aim is to begin a discussion of the cultural differences between the United States and Nepal as they impinge on the research process itself. But I don't intend this as an integrated and final analysis. Rather, I want to recreate the process of my own discovery of difference. This will mean dipping into some of the research material I gathered as a way of highlighting some of what I consider to be key and what I believe de Tocqueville considered vital over 150 years ago. These are differences in character, in the very notion of person, and the idealised relationship between individual and group—in short, an entire cultural orientation that is part and parcel of everyday life and the research process for studying that life.

Context of Research

A large and growing number of Nepali students, teachers, and researchers travel to the United States every year. According to USEF/N figures (2001), for example, over the past 40 years (1961-2001) some 540 students and teachers have visited the USA for numerous different academic and scholarly purposes. It's safe to say that additional hundreds of students and teachers visit the USA under the sponsorship of other programs, either related directly to universities or to other private organisations. The vast majority of these Nepali students and teachers do one of three things in the USA:

- a) go to their respective school or university, complete their degree requirements, and return home;
- b) become involved in collaborative research, often with back and forth visits, on Nepali subjects with American professors who have their own Nepal-related research programs;
- c) look for a job, whether legal or illegal, that will allow them to stay in America as long as possible and in a way that quite often cuts them off from a serious contribution to the well-being of Nepali society itself.

Much more rare are cases of a Nepali student or teacher becoming involved in the study of American culture itself. It is even less likely to see that involvement extend to ethnographic field research of the sort that promises the most intimate understanding of American families, society, and culture. This is that rare kind of knowledge that may be most relevant to Nepal's achieving full membership in the world community of countries that stands as an international version of the "civil society" each hopes to attain domestically. It certainly offers a more explicit possibility of self-understanding through a comparative lens as we "achieve" a middle-class identity (cf. Liechty 2003).

Again, the contrast with those Americans who come to Nepal is striking. A tidal wave of foreign students and teachers, mostly Americans, wash across our landscape every year, often sponsored by one of several programs (such as the Peace Corps or the Fulbright programmes). They come perhaps just slightly less often on their own resources, able to do so because of the vastly cheaper living circumstances they encounter here. Even those who come first with one programme, such as the Peace Corps, will often extend and deepen

their familiarity with our country by parlaying that initial encounter into anthropological research in Nepal. The western fascination with Nepal dates from the earliest encounters (Hamilton 1811; Buchanan 1819; Hodgson 1874) and robustly continues to the present. Charmed by its diverse culture and landscape, those who come to understand the Nepali language and society through one venue are often more highly motivated and better prepared than others to pursue anthropological research in our country.

My mention of those 19th century British historians and proto-ethnographers – Hamilton, Buchanan, and Hodgson – is intended to draw attention to the important fact that the western encounter with Nepal has always been fieldwork-based even though its formalisation in the sense of academic anthropology only began with the work of British anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in the mid-1950s. This draws attention to the imperial roots of the fieldwork tradition and forces us to ask how those roots colour the contemporary imbalance in true fieldwork exchanges between Nepal and the west. Of course, it might be argued that the American tradition of anthropological fieldwork in Nepal, beginning as early as 1962 with John Hitchcock (see Hitchcock 1966) and expanding rapidly since then to include dozens of American anthropologists, originates from more benign sources. But whatever the histories, the process has resulted in a vast array of field data collection along with the publication of books and articles that lend their own momentum for yet more of the same.

For the anthropologist from a developing country like Nepal, on the other hand, it is indeed a far more difficult task to turn the tables by doing fieldwork in today's most developed country, the United States. There are, first, two clear-cut structural reasons in (a) the financial constraints which must afflict anyone hoping to go from an economically weaker setting to one vastly richer and (b) the difficulties of obtaining proper affiliation with respective universities, to say nothing of the more recent necessity of obtaining research clearance letters from the Internal Review Boards (IRB) of those universities. Second, there are a set of cultural difficulties. I will try to develop them throughout the essay, but will say here that they have to do with the sharp contrast between the Nepali approach to the person and an American individualism identified by Tocqueville and developed later by Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1996).

I should note that I find research clearance procedures to be a valuable tool in protecting anthropological informants from harm and it is true that these same boards must approve the research of those American-based scholars who

work in Nepal. At the same time, I want to draw attention to an inherent inequality. While American researchers are approved by American IRB committees to conduct fieldwork in Nepal, Nepali scholars must also be approved by American IRB committees to conduct fieldwork in the United States. There are many imbalances worth pointing out. Nepali institutions merely accept the American process. But there is no comparable acceptance of Nepali institutional procedures by Americans. And there is the added imbalance of Americans obtaining research approval in a cultural context that is entirely their own, while Nepalis seek approval in that same American context, foreign and potentially difficult to understand.

This notion of context is, of course, very important to any social science enterprise, both at the theoretical level where we know how context is key to interpreting any behaviour and also at the practical level of actually conducting research on the ground. For cultural anthropology this is especially important since few other disciplines require the total immersion in "context" that so pointedly defines fieldwork. Let me begin my story, then, by describing in personal terms how I became involved in ethnographic research on working families in the United States of America.

Considering the two structural difficulties for a developing country anthropologist in America, I was lucky enough in both areas. Not only did I receive a grant for doing ethnographic research but along with that grant came proper affiliation with the University of Michigan, itself one of the most prestigious universities in the USA. It would have been an ironclad impossibility for a Nepali anthropologist to do ethnographic research on American soil using his own resources. A full professor at Tribhuvan University earns the equivalent of about US \$200 per month. Nor could the financial support one might expect for "outside home country research" from the government of Nepal come close to funding a research venture in America.

Linked to finances is the other serious problem of obtaining an American visa with the aim of doing ethnographic research in the USA without a prior American university affiliation. Although it is easier to obtain an American visa in Nepal if a person is a student or teacher, the practice of a Nepali researcher going to America to study Americans is so rare that American consular officials in Kathmandu took more than the usual convincing about the truth of my own research plans. Fortunately, both of these hurdles could be overcome in my case because of my long collaboration with Dr. Tom Fricke, with whom I have worked in active collaboration over

the last two decades on issues related to social change, demography and kinship in a number of Nepali communities. We have focused mainly on the Tamang ethnic group and have published in both Nepali and American journals. This long and firm collegial relationship, begun in the 1980s, built a foundation of familiarity with American institutions and scholarly practice through our joint analyses of Nepali material and my frequent trips to the University of Michigan in that collaboration.

In 1998 because of his long interest in comparative research, Dr. Fricke received a large grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to establish a centre focusing on social and cultural change among American middle class working families. The programme is housed within the newly established Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life (CEEL), a part of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. CEEL's mandate is to explore contemporary transformations in work and family life using the tools of anthropologists (Fricke 1998). Because of our long collaboration and mutual interests, Dr. Fricke invited me to join his American project, thinking that my perspective would add to his own understanding of American families just as his discussions with me in Nepal affected my own thinking about my home society. This new project has given me an opportunity to work as an anthropologist exploring in field research among Americans themes very similar to those I have addressed in my Nepali research.

Field Research in the United States of America

My American research gave me the opportunity to explore facets of everyday life in both rural and urban settings. The urban research work was part of a larger joint collaborative programme with a multi-investigator research team exploring the work and family lives of autoworkers from a single factory in Southeast Michigan. The rural fieldwork, on the other hand, was shared with Tom Fricke who invited me to accompany him to his field site in North Dakota, where I joined him in sharing the life and work of a single farm family. The fully ethnographic and fieldwork based nature of our work on farm families contrasted with the methods employed in the urban area. At the outset, let me confess that by general ethnographic standards my fieldwork, however intense, was limited. For the actual field study of these American families I spent about a month or so with the North Dakotan farm families and little more than three months with the urban families in Southeast Michigan. Of course, this is the period of actual field contact. My research

residence in the United States was much longer and I should point out, too, that even de Tocqueville's pioneering research in America was confined to a total of nine months with frequent travel and little in the way of long-term residence with single families (de Tocqueville 2003).

Research in the Urban Setting

I joined CEEL on October 1, 2000 to take up a one year position as Senior Research Fellow. The Director advised me to join a research team composed of six persons who were preparing with CEEL funding to carry out a research project on industrial autoworkers in Southeast Michigan. The initial goal of this large project was aimed at understanding basic questions about work, career, and satisfaction among autoworkers and their families. It also hoped to explore how autoworkers prepare their children, directly and indirectly, for careers both within and beyond the auto industry. However, from that initial set of issues, the nature of the project gradually expanded to include other questions.

Almost from the very start, my enthusiasm for jumping into data collection ran into frustration. Because the research project took a long time to obtain clearance from both the University of Michigan's Internal Review Board and also from the plant management and Union Local at the factory, a process that took almost six months, my initial dream of doing a detailed ethnographic study on urban American working families within my given time frame gradually dwindled. Throughout that period I was not sure whether my research time would be extended. Also, since I was living alone and without my family in the USA, I was a little homesick as well. In other words, I had come to Michigan prepared to return home after completing my intended one year project, a period that seemed adequate to the ethnographic work I had in mind.

Faced with the impossibility of going immediately into data collection, I had to use my allocated research time in the best way possible. Our research team began to organise meetings directed toward developing a rigorous research design for deciding appropriate data and methods for gathering it. I considered this a valuable opportunity for me to learn more about American research techniques and their "sensitivity" toward the goals of the research project as a whole. As a result, I continuously participated in these meetings: today, when I review my notes, I see that over a six month period I attended more than 30 of them and that they each lasted from one to three hours. Each meeting focused on the topic of how to conduct our fieldwork among the

working families of industrial autoworkers. Although interesting, I regarded our discussions as somewhat abstract because we never actually tested our thoughts with real people throughout this period.

Considering the increasingly limited time available for my own research, I decided to pursue some independent data collection within the framework of IRB approval for the overall project. After some discussion, one of my colleagues on the project and I decided to do some more open-ended interviews with a small sample of retired autoworkers from the same Southeast Michigan plant. This was both for the satisfaction of active field data collection and also to prepare us for the ongoing research project by gaining familiarity with our research population. My colleague and I thought that retirees would be exactly the right people to tell us something of the inside story of the plant and the changing nature of work within the auto industry. We also thought it would be interesting for its own sake to observe their work and family life after retirement. Finally, we believed that an understanding of the lives of retirees could serve as a way of opening us up to the success story of auto industry workers more generally, in particular how their story was a kind of symbol for the rise of an American "middle class" tradition through labour.

We began tape recording interviews in January 2001 and conducted the last interview for this sub-project on June 14, 2001. Most of the interviews took place in the office of the Union Local. A few interviews were carried out at the homes of retirees as well. Out of a total of 15 tape-recorded interviews conducted with the autoworkers, 12 focused on retired workers. All of these retirees worked in the same Southeast Michigan plant between 1959-2001.

Some Themes Emerging in Research Among Retired Autoworkers

Work, work ethics and family life. In America a visitor from Nepal gets the impression that people spend their whole days in the name of "work". Since ethnographic questions are always fundamentally questions of meaning and interpretation (Taylor 1985; Fricke 2004), it is worth asking how autoworkers (and by extension, any human being) find meaning and achieve an identity within the terms of an existence that leaves so little time for anything other than work. It turns out that retired autoworkers are not very different in their ideas about work from people in American society as a whole. Let me demonstrate with quotes from both taped interviews and reconstructions from my field notes.

I asked these questions regarding the nature of work to a white male retiree and former supervisor on the shop floor. He pointed out that "auto work is physical work, machinery work, and some work of a repetitive nature," and insisted that in the context of the plant, communal values pervaded his approach to the work ethic. As he put it, "helping other people at work, you become happy in your own job." Nevertheless, he also expected some kind of respect from those who worked under him. Overall, he had a feeling of accomplishment that came from going out to do something and achieving it. He pointed out, for example, that in the past, workers who were often the sons of immigrants or recent migrants to the city from rural areas worked very hard because they desired a new life and the betterment of their family. But with more recent changes in American society, he shared his sense of decline in these values:

Now, a lot of young folks really don't like to work. It is because parents have given them too much. In the past, a man had a job to do. Today, a son won't help his father voluntarily for any kind of work. In the old days, there was motivation for work. These days young people do not respect work.

This sense of change was repeated in conversations with other retired workers. For example, another white male retired autoworker commented:

The work ethics of young people are very much different today than they were in the past. People of my generation [at least 35 years ago] used to work hard in the plant. Workers used to show up to work on time. In my time workers adhered to a single job for their whole lives. But there is no work ethic like that for young workers today. These days young people change jobs frequently.

Because America is often seen as a racially divided society, it is interesting to see if these feelings of change are shared by members of other groups. I asked similar questions to black and white retirees and found great similarity in their feelings. One of my respondents, a black male retiree had much to say not only about the change in values across generations, but the reasons why such changes occurred:

There are a lot of changes in work ethics across generations and in methods of approach. In my time an employee was expected to be at work everyday and on time. But the job doesn't mean so much to the average young person these days. Today, because so many benefits are given by the government, young people started drinking. In the past people used to go to church every Sunday whether they liked it or not. These days the young people attend church at their choice. In the past parents used to take children to church along with them. The father used to take his son to baseball and football games. In my time we used to feel pride when the family had a good name; families weren't looking for material benefits so much. Parents used to teach social values to children and this was the greatest wealth for them. Parents used to teach them to treat all women like one's own sisters. Today, a lot of parents do not guide their children properly. For example, the issue of sex among youngsters is left to the school. Whatever you learn at home is better than what you learn from the school.

As these three statements indicate, there seems to be a real sense of change in the values that surround work in America. It is worth asking ourselves if a similar change may be in the offing for our own middle class in Nepal since many of the conditions of shared hardship and achievement in the older generation seem to be similar in the experience of these American retiree and our Nepali middle class. It is interesting, too, that the diagnosis for change presented by the last retiree is similar to the argument of the sociologist David Halle (1987). He notes that the American family has lost many of its material functions today. Where once the responsibility for educating the children lay mostly with parents, now it lies with school. Once the care of the very sick took place within the family, now it is the domain of the hospital and nursing home.

Although the diagnosis of American ills and changed work ethic are similar for my respondents, one finds more variety in the stories of family life among these retirees. As with many in Nepal, most of these retired autoworkers grew up in large families of 8–10 members. In some cases, conjugal relations would break down and lead to divorce and remarriage. Of the 12 retirees, 4 couples had divorced and their children grew up with one parent or the other in a single mother or father household. Many of the

reasons for marital stress and eventual breakdown had to do with the difficulty of balancing work and family obligations. In other words, the devotion of one spouse to work could be so absolute that the family would be forgotten.

Some of the complexity of family structure among these American workers is due to movement. One white male retiree, for example, was born and brought up in a 7 member family, but his own parents were from very different parts of the USA. His father was originally from Detroit and the mother was from Arkansas, and they moved to the Detroit area of Southeast Michigan in 1944–45 because of work opportunities.

Another retiree gave a more elaborate narrative for his family life. He married for the first time with his high school sweetheart when he was just 25 years old. He had twin sons, now 35 years old, from this wife. His first wife was a home-maker, and for short time she also worked as a part-time sheriff. But both sons had a learning disability that may have been caused by their premature birth; because they were underweight, they were placed in an incubator for 6-8 weeks. The couple divorced in 1979. The man remarried a woman who already had a daughter, now 26 years old, from her first husband. He does not have any children from his second wife, who has three M.A. degrees and teaches in the local school.

These two cases suggest not only a change in family size comparable to the Nepali demographic transition, but also the extreme mobility of American society in both geographic and social terms. Work takes a central role not only in bringing people together from widely separate parts of the country, but also in bringing people together from what appear to be different class backgrounds, as in the case of the divorced man who remarried a more highly educated spouse. To speak of family complexity in America is to speak of more than family structure itself. It also includes different traditions and backgrounds, regionally and in the class system. This makes the family not only a creator of stability in America, but also an engine of change. But underlying this is its interaction with work.

Many retired male workers also said that working in factories as in the auto industry demands physical strength. They would argue that the domain of work for females should be at home and not in the factory. But some retired women autoworkers challenged this traditional notion by proving themselves capable of doing any kind of work within the auto industry or elsewhere.

Life of Retirees and the Concept of the Good Life. Retired autoworkers lead their lives in various ways after the uniformity of work before retirement. Most of them spend their time either going to church regularly or meeting their own relatives, either within or outside the local area. Nevertheless, a few retirees are quite active after retirement; some give training to autoworkers and some run their own businesses. I noticed, however, that female retirees had more problems than their male counterparts. This is because they were either living alone or physically disabled and thus finding difficulties in adjusting to the new retiree situation.

Take the life of one female black retiree. Here is how she responded to my question about how she spent her time:

I go to the church everyday.... I pray a lot and read the Bible, travel where I can, and try to read a lot.

Because she lived alone, I wondered if she felt lonely after a long work life in the company of others:

No, I am not lonely. As I said before, I read the Bible and go to church and I trust in God for strength and help. But my body hurts me day and night as I have a lot of pain in my arm and shoulder [this is because of her hard work in the plant]. Sometimes ... it hurts so much I don't get sleep all night.

As the above statements suggest, she is living as a single person and retired because of her physical disabilities. But it was while visiting church that she found she could share her feelings about the joys and sufferings of everyday life with her fellows. In fact, church has become the common ground for retirees to spend their time, replacing daily workplace meetings.

For the generations of autoworkers who have spent their lives in this Southeast Michigan plant since 1932, the workplace itself is more than a place of livelihood. It is also the concrete symbol of their cultural identity as blue-collar workers. One might wonder if this symbol provides resources beyond the working years by underwriting security and the good life after retirement.

In the American cultural context, the pursuit of the good life is directly related to a person's job, both in terms of its type and in terms of the money earned through it. There is no doubt that autoworkers, even though classified

as "blue-collar" or working class, earn very good money through their hard work thanks to historically strong labour unions. Still, their savings often amount to little once they retire. After retirement, too, such benefits as government social security and worker pensions can amount to less than expected, making it hard to sustain a relatively good life even for two people after their children have left home. I noticed how some retirees had sold the big houses they once owned, moving into small houses as a way of saving money for their unpredictable future. Many retirees today are on the fringes of the economy and find very little financial contentment in their lives. Retirees seeking post-retirement jobs are few, yet most families face difficult survival today without two people pulling in wages. Their lock-step career paths offer little job security these days and even in the past most of the now retired autoworkers worked overtime for better money. This need for more fuelled a working ethos without leisure that could rebound in unpredictable ways on their personal lives, leading in some cases to the break-up of families through divorce.

In reality, money, morals, and manners are overlapping themes in American culture – as they must be for virtually any culture in the world today. Economic concerns are exacerbated by a perceived decline in family values which until recently included an expectation of care for the aged or the retiree within the family home. The process of socialisation for American children is such that they are taught how to leave home from the earliest years. The stress is on their autonomy and independence in their own lives. By leaving home, people not only leave their own families, but also their own communities, friends, churches, and so on. In other words, Americans are nearly programmed for departure. They depart from their families and the values of those families in their quest for self and the autonomous betterment of their individual lives. De Tocqueville (2003) already saw this at least 150 years ago when he labelled Americans as the "restless" people. And so it is that even today, in the name of autonomy and freedom, old retirees are debarred from the social and economic security that might be provided by their own family members. The only alternative forms of care available to them are in the culturally devalued programmes that come under the heading of "welfare". Welfare is a notion that contradicts the motivations for pursuing money and the autonomous self of American culture. It implies dependence and few Americans want to live on "welfare". But those retirees who have saved little in their life are faced with the eventuality of landing in such welfare programmes.

In brief, the idea of the "good life" in America, particularly in the context of blue-collar autoworkers, is a fascinatingly deceptive one. That is why Halle (1987: xii) notes the ambiguity of the claim that blue-collar workers are middle class or bourgeois. There is a perceived overlap between the lives and beliefs of blue-collar workers and those of the middle class, yet there are important differences in the structure of social resources and, perhaps more importantly, the personal and family histories by which claims to economic self-sufficiency and the good life may be made.

In Nepal the concept of a retiree is an important and emerging, but not yet crystallized, reality in urban areas. One finds it especially relevant for those who retire from jobs in the government, academia, and a few of the new corporations. In rural areas, on the other hand, where more than 85% of Nepal's people live today, "retirement" can only be said to occur with an ageing process that links the notion to familial processes. Thus, the elderly hand their farms in equal distribution to their sons, choosing to live with one of these sons in a state that approaches the definition of retirement in a wage-labour focused society such as the United States. It is considered an ethical and moral requirement in Nepali culture that a son (or sons) look after parents who are old or otherwise unable to make an independent living, whether the setting is rural or urban. That requirement extends to having at least one son remaining with elderly parents to provide daily support for them during old age. Thus it is common for parents to live with at least one child until the parent's death. These parents, of course, reciprocate with childcare and advice in the larger family interest. In other words, the ideology of family support for the elderly dominates in Nepal. Those who more formally retire after career-style employment receive an additional financial benefit in the form of a monthly pension, but this is not a replacement for familial support. Nepali retirees, or the elderly more generally, don't suffer the loneliness of their American counterparts. They constantly interact with family members in various social and economic contexts. Indeed, one worships parents and ancestors all one's life, a practice and culture of respect that binds the generations through time in Nepal.

If I were to make more general claims, I would make two. First, the basic difference between the two societies has to do with a difference between a continuing basis in kin, which stresses continuity, and a basis in the market, which celebrates discontinuity. Second, and this follows de Tocqueville again, there are fundamentally different notions of personhood at stake here. In America, commodities and cash become modes of objectifying personal

identity. The autonomous person is highlighted at the expense of kinship in personal identity in everyday life. In Nepal, personal identity finds its location within the web of kinship and family. It is imbibed daily and concretely as a family matter in everyday social order and relationships.

Research in a Rural Setting: The Farm Families of North Dakota

Because I was myself born and brought up in an agricultural family in Eastern Nepal, I thought that fieldwork among American farm families would be interesting beyond its purely scholarly potential. With my own personal experience, I could compare American and Nepali cultures of family and farming life. I was able to do exactly this kind of comparative study when Tom Fricke invited me to join him at his research site in North Dakota. In this section I provide a brief account of that fieldwork based on the field diary in which I made daily entries during the month or so I lived with an American farm family. Although incomplete in some respects, these notes provide a broad view of everyday life—landscape, work, and family—on the American farm as seen through the lens of North Dakota. Wherever possible, I have compared American farm life with the farm life of Nepali families.

Though American farmers currently produce 40 % of the world's corn, 45% of its soybeans and 10% of its wheat, they represent less than 2% of the total population of that country. The average American farm size was 432 acres in 2000. This is equivalent to 3,456 ropani in Nepal, yet the farming population as a whole is considered relatively poor in America. The mid-western states of America (including Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and others) are considered the breadbasket of the world.

North Dakota, where I did my fieldwork, is thought of by the majority of Americans as one of the most remote and poor states within the mid-western region. In the American mind, it occupies a position similar to Humla district in Nepal. It is a part of America's region of prairies, fields, and meadows where annual precipitation averages just 15-20 inches per year. The whole area is basically a dry farming area with irrigation used very sparingly. This dry land farming is a system of producing crops in semi-arid regions, usually with less than 20 inches of annual rainfall without irrigation. Frequently, part of the land will lie fallow in alternate years to conserve moisture. Like the monsoon in Nepal, farmers here expect rain in certain months of the year. But

because of the uncertainties of farming in the face of drought and the like, the US government has introduced an act to provide security to American farmers. This act is known as the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 and includes the Food Security Act of 1985. This act pays farmers the production value of land in a given year in cases where the government tells the farmer not to cultivate his farm land because of an over-supply of certain crops in the market.

This part of America was considered to be a virtually barren land in the past. The American government encouraged its settlement by providing free land to those willing to live and work on the soil. Thus, the American Homestead Act of 1862 offered settlers to the Great Plains, which includes North Dakota, 160 acres of free land if they remained on it for five years. Still, life on these treeless plains was never easy and it remains one of the most thinly populated parts of the United States. Tom Fricke (2003: 58) wrote about it like this:

The Great Plains' difference comes from contrast, something not quite right to a person from further east. You try to contain the country by scaling it against what you already know. All those exits along the interstate with their no services signs. The gaps between towns. The gray boards of abandoned homesteads like so many tattered rags on a barbed-wire fence. At night you can drive for an hour and not see a light. In the morning you can search the whole horizon and not see a shack. The wind whips the grasses. The meadowlarks call. And you'll remember some article you read a long time ago about how the small towns are dying, the farmers moving on, and the prairie returning to its past.

Historically, a similar kind of underpopulation prevailed in the Nepal Tarai as well. Though the Nepal Tarai was highly fertile agriculturally, it was a deadly malarial area before 1960. To attract farmers for farming and resettlement, the Nepali government introduced an Act around 1932 saying that a farmer who cultivated land in this area would be entitled to receive two bighas of land (about 3.5 acres) at no cost. Today, the land of the Nepal Tarai is so valuable that nobody would even begin to think of parting with a square foot of that same land for free.

The average farm size in North Dakota was 1290 acres (10,320 ropani) in 1997. This is much higher than the national average, but the land is correspondingly less productive. More than XX [????] per cent of the people in this state depend on agriculture. The density of population was only 9 people per square mile in 2000 and the population size has been declining over the years. The population size, which was 680,845 in 1930, came down to 637,808 in 1998. The ethnic composition was 94.6% white, followed by 4.1% native American and smaller numbers of other groups. The white population is dominated by people whose ancestors migrated to the plains from Germany and Scandinavia and most of this wave of immigration occurred between 1880 and 1910.

Within North Dakota, our research focused on Stark County in the western and driest part of the state. The population of this county was also declining. There were 22,832 people in 1990 and 22,707 in 1998. Within Stark County a town was selected for detailed research. Its population had been more or less stable over the last 90 years with 647 people in 1910 and 652 in 2000. This town today is 118 years old and the original settlers of this area were German people whose ancestors left Germany first for Russia or Hungary and later migrated to the United States.

The decline in population, especially given the formerly large family sizes, suggests that very few people are interested in staying in farming or in the general area. People in the younger generations are especially likely to find little attraction to farming. They constantly move towards the bigger cities for jobs and education. Interestingly, most of these young people who move choose to live in the state of North Dakota (about 70%); the rest scatter to larger American cities such as Minneapolis.

Some Themes Emerging in Research Among Rural Farm Families

Culture and Work of Farming families. Much of the daily life of American farm families revolves around gardening, planting, weeding, cutting grasses for animals, storing grains in the bins and hauling grains in large grain trucks to the appropriate market centres for cash or payment. Life looks relatively hard as there is little free time except for occasional family gatherings and those cases of a death in the family or community. It is hard to calculate the working hours but normally a member of the farm family spends 12–14 hours a day at hard work during the planting and harvesting seasons. Most of what they eat does not come from their own farming: this is a highly

market oriented economy and all goods required for domestic consumption come directly from the market, much as is true for urban Americans.

The American style of settlement in farming areas differs from what one finds in many parts of the world. Rather than a clustered village of many separate houses, settlements are organised around a set of buildings, including family houses and utility buildings. Normally 4–6 buildings are grouped together by a farm family: a body shop for repairing heavy machinery, a cattle shed, bins for storing grains, and of course a separate residential house for members of the family.

The family is basically nuclear and includes a husband, wife and unmarried children below about 18 years old. At least one generation before now, a farming family used to have 4–6 children. These days, single men or women may be found running farms because of divorce or a person remaining unmarried. In American culture it is an accepted fact that a man and woman can live together for years without getting married—marriage is considered primarily a public and ritual event. A person in Nepal cannot begin to imagine this way of forming a conjugal unit without a public declaration of commitment. But this seems to be a logical outgrowth of the American emphasis on the individual as opposed to membership in larger groupings, such as the family.

As in Nepal, farming is largely a family enterprise in which the work is performed by members of one's own family. For example, in A's farm area where Tom Fricke and I stayed for about a month with the family members (in this family, there were four members but the 20-year-old daughter had recently married and stayed with her husband in the city area), more than 3000 acres is farmed by three members: the man (husband), woman (wife) and the son. But the son is already in the first year of college and helps his parents in farming activities only during his vacation period. Obviously, farming with this low labour force requires high investment in labour-saving machinery.

A grown-up son normally runs tractors for seeding and spraying herbicide on weeds during the summer. Herbicides are chosen to kill only weeds and not the planted crops. Two major seasons dominate the annual cycle of farming: winter and spring. For services in his parents' house during the summer and winter (when he is free to work) the son is paid a monthly salary. During the winter (November through March), he helps parents in the daily task of feeding cattle. The wife is the homemaker. She does all the domestic chores, cooking, cleaning the house and courtyard, washing clothes, kitchen gardening, taking care of young calves and cutting grass around the courtyard.

When the need arises, she picks up the van to help her husband on the farm as well. In addition, she does the work of bookkeeping (that is, keeping records of their income and expenditure). The man works on the farm, tilling, seeding, applying herbicide, harvesting, baling the hay and taking care of livestock. During the summer, the livestock (the family owns 100 cows with their calves and four bulls) are left in their own pasturage areas. The pasturage area is fenced by barbed wire to prevent animals from moving to another person's land. During the winter, the man feeds the cattle, transports grains to the market and checks his books to decide which crops to plant in the coming year.

Much like the family we lived with, a neighbouring couple also cultivated a large farm area by themselves. Their grown-up daughter who had just finished her high school that year used to help her parents at farm work, looking after cattle, and other chores. Occasionally, a farmer will employ labourers during the seeding and harvesting seasons if there is an emergency, if bad weather narrows the time in which the work must be finished, or if other work needs doing at the same time.

Normally, three types of crops are cultivated in this area: wheat, legumes and oil seeds, with the percentage of a single farmer's total production breaking down as follows:

Wheat : 50 %

Legumes : 25%

Oil seeds : 25% (normally crambe, sunflower or canola)

Single cropping, or mono-cropping, on a single field or plot is the standard pattern of farming for the whole area. That is, one doesn't find multiple crops in the same fields. Normally cropping starts from April-May and most of the crops are harvested by August-September. The growing season in this area is among the shortest in the United States south of Canada and places severe constraints on the types of crops that can be grown.

As in Nepal, a successful American farmer is one who not only farms but also raises cattle at the same time. Cattle raised in this area are mostly females (normally one bull is raised for breeding purposes for each 25 cows). Cows are raised for their calves, which are sold in the market when they become about 9 months old. Farmers here say that a cow gives birth to 20-22 calves in her lifetime. A barren cow is generally quickly sold for meat in the market.

During the winter (December to March), when there is heavy snow and bitter cold, cattle are kept in sheds or corrals close to the farmstead and fed regularly by family members. Feed basically consists of grasses from the farm such as alfalfa and others. In addition, grains, legumes, and oil seeds are transported to market in large trucks. Machines are repaired or fixed during the wintertime as there is little farming done during this period. (It is not unusual in the winter months to have the temperature stay below zero degrees Fahrenheit for days at a time. Daytime temperatures stay below freezing for nearly the whole period. Appendix 1 provides more details for how farming is done in this part of America.

Culture of American farming. Weather and technology play a very important role in American farming. Because the whole area is a dry farming area, farmers take a great interest here in conserving moisture in the soil. Even tilling itself can lead to evaporation of moisture according to local farmers. Wind is another important factor in the local climate, where the landscape seems constantly to endure heavy winds because of its grassland character. As it blows, wind causes water to evaporate and thereby exacerbates the already arid conditions of the area. Nature and life go together in this part of North Dakota.

Cutting grasses and storing them in the form of hay bundles (as in Nepal) is another essential feature of American farming. Heavy machines and relatively dry days are required for cutting grass. At the same time, farmers do not bale the grass during overly hot and sunny days for fear that the grass will become dry and lose its protein content. So baling is done when the day is overcast but not damp. Weather conditions for baling are so specific that I have seen farmers bale hay after midnight if the moisture conditions are right. For spraying herbicides they need low wind speed (not more than ten miles per hour) or the herbicides could blow onto somebody else's farm and damage their crops. When the sunflower and wheat become tall enough to move in the wind, they need the seasonal rains at a rate of about one inch each week. Less than this runs the risk of heat destroying crops. In a very wet year, a second harvest of alfalfa may be possible, leading to plentiful hay.

In keeping with the overarching American concern with private property and the sanctity of the individual over the community, there are no common or community pastures in this region. Farmers must have their own pasturage for raising their animals. The only alternative is to make arrangements to pasture animals with another private landowner's herd, generally for payment.

In this semi-arid region, one animal requires in the range of 7-10 acres of pasture. Thus, if a farmer owns 100 heads of cattle, it is desirable that he should have about 700 acres of pasture.

All of these things are in contrast with the situation in Nepal. For example, the concern in Nepal is not to preserve moisture in the soil by reducing the tillage. In fact, here one finds that more and more tilling is required for cultivation because of the hardness of the soil. And it is generally only in a few areas of the Nepal Tarai where tractors can be used for tilling. Otherwise, all farming work is done manually. Also contrasting with the American situation are Nepali practices of pasturing animals. While the pasture area is also one's own farm, no special area is allocated for animals only as in America. In the highland mountain areas, there are still common lands for pasturage where shepherds bring their animals for a couple of months out of every year.

The other striking feature of farming in America is the capital-intensive use of machines for nearly every kind of activity. I was surprised to see that only two to three persons could cultivate nearly 3000 acres (24,000 ropanis) of land, something made possible solely by the heavy use of machinery. With their 3000 acres of land and 100 cows (plus four bulls and 100 calves), it was impossible not to notice the almost 16 different kinds of heavy machinery that were in use (see Appendix 2 for a list of the agricultural machinery owned and used by this particular family). In brief, modern American farming is highly dependent on technology. The larger and more sophisticated the machines are, the larger is the farm size of the farmer.

The other most important factor in American farming is the operating loans that nearly all farmers need to take out. Again, this seems to connect to the American culture of private ownership and extreme individualism. American farmers purchase most of their own machinery, seeds, herbicides, and fertiliser through loans. The farmer whose house I lived in had loans amounting to nearly \$500,000. Because of the heavy cost involved in farming, some farmers who would otherwise like to continue or take up this life are prevented from so doing simply because of the high capital start-up costs. One farmer told me that a farmer who wishes to cultivate 2000 acres of land must be prepared to spend about half million dollars beyond the price of the land itself.

Work and the Work Ethic. A and his family members think of work as no less than a necessary part of their life. Their work ethic is systematically

embedded within family values that emphasise hard work, both for the individual and for the good of the family. A's parents and grandparents were farmers. A himself has spent nearly all of his life in farming with short breaks in the local oil industry and as a railroad worker. His own son wants very much to spend his time in farming as well. If A and his son's generation are taken into account, then we have five generations in which this family has farmed this region of North Dakota. As an agricultural family, A grew up in a family of ten members. He has five brothers and three sisters along with his parents. A was the eldest son. But even this large American family represents a shrinking: A's mother told me that she grew up in a 15- member family. It was easy for me to see that the American farm family of the not too distant past must have looked very much like the Nepali farm family, at least in terms of size.

Narrating his family history, A's father told me that he was drafted in the army for two years and continued with the army for another six, before returning to North Dakota, where his parents and other relatives were still living as farmers. There, he and his brother started farming together for 27 years. They pooled their labour and machinery to farm two large sections of land that they owned separately. One was 1280 acres and the other 1300 acres. In those days, he said, they used to do everything by themselves and their agricultural machines were much smaller than they are now. They could produce enough to make a relatively good living.

In the past, the farmers of this area used to butcher their own animals to supply their own family meat. This domestic butchering parallels what is still found in Nepal. But these days young men do not like to do this kind work and, moreover, the proper equipment for butchering if the meat is to be sold is expensive for the needs of a single family. Because of this, they invite a butcher from the town when they need to butcher an animal for their family needs. A butcher normally charges \$200 to butcher a 1100 lb. cow. A's father also mentioned that butchering is best done in this area during the winter or the cool season.

For pork and pork sausages, A's father would go to buy a pig from a farmer who raised them and then take it to the slaughterhouse for butchering. Normally, farmers of this area store meat of different animals in big refrigerators for periods of more than six months. I noticed that A's house had two such big freezers. They no longer raise pigs and chickens on their farm. In the past, they would also make their own cream, butter, ice cream and so on but they no longer make these things these days. The problem is both that

raising dairy cattle is very time-consuming and that these products are available very cheaply in the market.

Problems in Conducting Research in the United States of America and Nepal

It will seem to some that I have made a detour from my opening themes. In fact, I have in some sense done just that. But I have done so to hint at some differences between Nepal and the United States that prove to be important in the research process itself. Let me return now to the discussion I began this essay with.

Structural Problem: IRB in the American Universities

In the United States, any research—whether in the areas of natural science, social science or humanities—that concerns what are called “human subjects” must be passed through the Internal Review Board of the university with which the researcher is affiliated. In other words, before starting any kind of research a researcher or team must get a clearance paper. In 1974, the American Congress passed the National Research Act and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare designed the federal guidelines for human subject research. These regulations were updated in 1981 with the name of “45 CFR 46” rules (shorthand for Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46, Protection of Human Rights). Technically, research that is not federally funded is not subject to the 45 CFR 46 rules but most universities hold all research to the federal standard, reasoning that it makes no sense to have two moral yardsticks (Shea 2000: 28).

The IRB is a committee formed by the university to carefully check research involving human subjects. This board checks the research proposal, particularly the objectives and the methodology (how the human subjects are treated in the research, the types of questions asked of informants, how the privacy of an informant is maintained, and related matters). All researchers must conform to the rules of the IRB review or face serious consequences. In the strict sense, this means no questions other than those approved may be asked. Failure to conform can even lead to expulsion from one’s job.

There is no IRB, formally constituted as such, nor “human subject guidelines” for approving research in Nepal. There are no doubt rules from particular departments or institutes that researchers need to be familiar with in the conduct of their research and affiliation with a department or institute is a

formal requirement of foreigners for obtaining research visas in Nepal. The researcher has to fill out an application form (along with submitting the research proposal, a proof of student/teacher status from his or her institution, and a sufficient funds guarantee paper) through the Centre for International Relations of the university. The Centre forwards this application to the appropriate department or research centre at the university for evaluation. After getting a clearance paper from these bodies, a researcher is affiliated either with the research centre (such as CNAS) or department (such as the Department of Sociology-Anthropology) of the university.

A student or teacher who has the proper documentation described here has no problem at all with obtaining affiliation with the university. There is only the question of timing since unexpected delays, often without a specific reason, are normal in Nepal. For this reason a foreign student, teacher, or researcher is advised to apply at least one or two months in advance of the expected research start time in Nepal. Normally, research permission is given for the period of one year or the time specified by the researcher in the proposal itself. If the researcher is not able to finish the research in the stipulated time, permission can be extended in consideration of the progress of the researcher.

In Nepal, a foreign researcher is actually required to send a progress report to the concerned department every six months. The truth of the matter is that this rule is barely followed unless there is a request for time extension. Neither the department nor the Centre for International Relations at the university do much in the way of supervising and confirming the researcher's activities performed in the name of research. There is no check to discover whether they are doing research as specified in the proposal or something else. Similarly, nobody bothers about questions being asked of respondents. It is not uncommon at all to have foreign researchers return to their own countries without even reporting to the concerned department of the Nepal host university. Once they've gone, nobody knows where the student or researcher has published an article, report, or book, in what language it was published, and so on. Very few foreign researchers have shown their concern for "human subjects" in those publications. They publish their material as they wish and without follow-up or penalty. With such lack of restraint, it is hardly surprising that so many anthropological articles and books have been written from work in developing countries like Nepal over the last few decades.

The situation is so loose in Nepal, that many foreign scholars even come on a tourist visa, which can permit visits of up to five months, and carry out their short-term research programmes without affiliation to any university department whatsoever. There is no agency that checks into this kind of underground or shadow research, even though it is assuredly being carried out in our country. Of course, many of these foreign funded projects in Nepal follow the IRB rules from their respective countries, particularly the United States. The issue here is the lack of concern on the part of the Nepal government or the concerned university about the type of research, its specific conduct, how human subjects are treated and protected, and so on.

Of Ethnography and Ethnographic Content:

My American Experience

Structural and methodological problems in the 'urban area. Because the urban project I was involved with was sponsored by the Center for Ethnography of Everyday Life (CEEL) at the University of Michigan, I expected that the primary method for collecting data would be ethnographic in nature. When I say ethnography here, I mean that the focus should be on "what people are doing rather than what they say they are doing." In other words, my expectation was that I would be watching and observing people while participating in their day-to-day lives. This proved to be impossible for me for a number of reasons. Some of these problems of doing field work in urban areas have already been narrated by other anthropologists who have worked in the United States and became applicable to my case as well. They include such things as concerns with the appropriateness of the sample size and the inability to draw a boundary of the field (Ortner 1993) and the danger that a lack of participant observation will cause an exclusive reliance on field-based interviews (Sanjek 2000).

Ethnographic research in an urban setting, like that of the Southeast Michigan auto plant, raises several problems of contextualisation in terms of the ability to come up with a manageable research unit in temporal and spatial terms. One can't follow enough people with a level of intensity that allows a knowledge of the whole community. Eventually, I ended up choosing a methodology that was less ethnographic and more on the order of detailed case studies of available retired autoworkers. The research became interview-based, not the best circumstance for an ethnographer, and the questions following IRB restrictions had to be based on the topic list designed

for the larger project. I am using the term "available" here because many retirees live quite far from the present plant or in states other than Michigan.

Neither of these strategies is a good thing for ethnographic representation. I feel strongly that ethnography as practice is not a technique that one learns in the classroom. It is practice through years of actual field contact that perfects the ethnographer. Most basic to the doing of ethnography is the need to live closely in contact with the people of study. Nevertheless, this opportunity was not to be for me in the urban setting because of the inbuilt structural problems that were part of the larger project design. One problem, for example, was that my interviews were confined to retired autoworkers and to places mutually agreed upon by both parties in advance. Because of this, there was little opportunity for me to talk with other family members, to have the experience of a first-hand look at their houses, or to develop a first-hand understanding of closely observed family life, and so on. In other words, the American cultural focus on the individual rather than the group was replicated in the very terms of my research process itself. My relations were always with single individuals, never in context, and usually apart from their group memberships.

Like most ethnographers in natural settings, I have the habit of asking questions in a straightforward manner and as they arise in conversation. Many times I wanted to know more closely about the family life of workers as a way of making comparisons among different families. I wanted to put more questions to the autoworkers outside of the pre-established set of interview questions, but I was restricted by the principal investigator of this urban project to an agreement not to ask a single question beyond those already approved by the IRB. This already seems to me to be a violation of the natural flow of ethnography where questions arise in the situation itself. Similarly, as a researcher I was not allowed to stay in the house of any autoworkers since that might jeopardise larger research goals. I began to feel that the project's principal investigator was worried about me as a researcher, thinking that I might ask "nonsense" questions not relevant to the project and that these might jeopardise not only the research project but, it seemed to me, his job within the university. I felt that the research had lost its heart. Its whole intention appeared to be driven by the need to ask questions as they were approved by the IRB and strictly to maintain the privacy of individuals.

And yet, for me, fieldwork—especially what we call "participant observation"—is the heart of cultural anthropology. It is through that that I believe we are able more profoundly to understand the day-to-day life of even

these urban autoworkers. And it is that which should have been conducted, even among those retirees, in addition to formal interviews. I have always believed in relationships of reciprocity with people. It seems to me now that this is an approach to human research that grows out of my cultural identity as a Nepali rather than an American with his stress on the individual. I believed that fieldwork in its ethnographic sense would provide me with an immediate and uncensored sense of people in their factory surroundings and their everyday life. This fieldwork should have been central, but it became for me an ad-hoc and impulsive exercise without legitimacy in the eyes of the larger project. For me, earning research legitimacy also became a big issue because English is my second language. I felt a need to leave many anthropologically pertinent research questions unasked out of the simple fear that I must follow the rules of the Internal Review Board or face the unknown, but potentially serious, consequences of carrying out research outside their bounds (see Shea 2000; Vidich and Bensman 2000).

There were, of course other problems of a more practical sort. Trying to do participant observation with people who are scattered over large distances and constantly on the move is frustrating. One of my collaborators, however, was himself a retired autoworker living in Southeast Michigan. Thanks to his deep and personal knowledge of the day-to-day life of autoworkers, I was able to salvage some experience of participant observation in my research.. In that spirit I attended churches along with workers, observed local elections and union meetings, and attended the Labor Day parade in Detroit where a large number of retirees had gathered. I also had a few opportunities to participate in the potluck lunches of retirees. I nevertheless feel that the cost of creating a ethnography entirely from decontextualised narratives alone is the risk that their meaning is taken for granted so that questions vital for anthropological understanding are left unasked.

My experience in the United States refreshes my realisation that doing fieldwork is so easy and simple in Nepal. An anthropologist or researcher, native or foreigner, has easy access to anybody's house and can talk to anybody in the house (assuming adequate language ability) who is home to talk with. Local people are invariably happy to welcome an outsider, who always has the status of a guest in Nepali culture. If a householder does not treat a guest properly he could ruin the credit obtained for all the virtues he has earned in life. There is no Internal Review Board as such within the University system that checks on the activities of a researcher in the field. In other words, nobody bothers as to what a researcher is doing in the field in

Nepal. This may be an exaggeration of what is desirable, but it certainly reduces the strangling sense of fear that seems so much a part of the current situation of human research in the USA.

Cultural problems in the rural area. In many ways, but for somewhat different reasons, doing ethnography with farm families was also complex and difficult for me. Again, in this project site, individual families were very scattered; families might live 5–10 miles apart. It becomes virtually impossible to do a field study, even in a rural setting, without driving a car. As a contrast, in rural Nepal (mostly in the hill and mountain areas), many houses are clustered in a relatively small space. It's only in a small number of cases that a researcher needs to walk 1-2 hours to find a house after he's finished at another. Moreover, a researcher needs approval from a family before visiting the house to engage in conversation. This is because, first, they may have no time to talk for long periods when they are constantly busy at their own work. Secondly, Americans are very generally reluctant to share information about their families, their work, or their income with any outsider on short notice or acquaintance. This is a part of the culture of possession and privacy that is so important to Americans.

Since few American farmers have spare time for conversations in rural areas, an ethnographer must be prepared to do just about anything if he wants to talk with an informant. My own interests were in American family life in the rural areas, especially in husband and wife relations and their feelings about their grown-up children. I had to talk with A's wife for a significant period of time for this but she was free only while also painting woodwork in her house and courtyard. So I joined her in this work, doing some of the enamel painting myself, for nearly four hours. I had never done this kind of enamel painting in my life so the cost of my efforts was a ruined T-shirt as enamel spilled over the different parts of my body. Yet, the product of this small sacrifice was a deeper understanding of her and the values she held about her family life.

I noticed that even in the rural setting American farmers are like other Americans in that they are very sensitive about their property and the privacy of their way of life. Once I innocently put a very straightforward question to a farmer: "How much land (in acreage) do you own as a farmer"? This straightforward and direct way of asking made this a quite sensitive question. The farmer was a little embarrassed, uncomfortable, and reluctant in replying to my question. Tom Fricke told me this was not the right way of asking

such a question in this setting and I later realised that no farmer would answer if the query was put in this way since it violated the American sense of individual privacy and the sacredness of the relation between property and the self.

Tom Fricke also told me that it is not possible to get data on the landholdings of individual farmers from the county courthouse in Dickinson (where land records for this area are available). The records are organised by location rather than by individual or family. One could fairly easily get average landholding data for the area but an office, whether government or commercial, has no right to expose the individual's ownership of property rights. In other words, information about household economies may be inaccessible to researchers who do not first get to know the families themselves. This is again due to attitudes toward privacy coupled by the widespread fears of farmers about government intrusion into their lives. I was also told that the county recorder would not pass on this type of personal data to an outsider or a researcher. With every turn, I began to realise the sacredness of privacy throughout American life, whether rural or urban, and to see that these strictly cultural concerns are built into the very conduct and definition of legitimate research methods.

In Nepal, of course, ownership of land is systematically linked to the economic status of the family. The higher the amount of land owned by a family, the higher its socio-economic status. There is a natural tendency here, too, for a farmer to conceal this kind of information in the first conversation with an outsider (even to a Nepali researcher). Yet his motivation is not so much to maintain privacy *per se*, but to avoid showing himself to be either rich or poor in the local context. Nevertheless, family ownership of land can be easily verified, either by asking neighbours (who both know it and are happy to share it, in contrast to American farmers who may know it but be equally reluctant to share it) or from the District Land Record Revenue Office (Mal) where the land record of an individual farmer can be found.

Compared to Nepal, I found doing research in America to be difficult and time consuming for many reasons relating to a different sense of individual boundaries and to the sheer availability of information. In America, no informant will provide personal data on property, family relations, and other details without a high level of intimate familiarity because all of these things are symbolic of the self-contained individual. At the same time, no office (government or private) will provide data at an individual level, even in the name of research, because protection of individual privacy dominates

American culture and law. In cases like this, and unlike in Nepal, a simple letter of identification held by the researcher has little meaning to the subject of study.

If a researcher is engaged in study anywhere in Nepal, his or her office will write a letter to the concerned authority in the area (for example, the Chief District Officer, CDO, or the chairman of the Village Development Committee, VDC) asking them to help in the field site. The CDO even writes to the chairman of the concerned VDC to help the researcher in whatever way possible. At the district level, the Land Reform Office or Revenue Office will help an individual researcher by providing an individual landholding record, if asked.

Finally, I was also interested in identifying rich and poor farmers as they were perceived in the local context. My own host family (A), although they cultivated a little more than 3000 acres of land, would only say that they "are okay economically within the terms of the local setting". It was indeed a difficult question to ask and I found it impossible to have anybody answer this question in a clear way. I spoke with my colleague, Tom Fricke, about ways of getting at an answer to this problem. At one point he suggested that I go with a farmer who enjoyed company and was taking his very large freight truck to transport seed to the market in another area.

This farmer happened to be taking crambe seed to a place to the west known as Belfield where it would be transferred to large bins for storage. I was delighted to join him since this was the first time in my life that I had ridden in a truck of such size, much larger than the biggest trucks on our Nepali roads. I ended up joining him in the cab of his truck for the round-trip journey of some 7–8 hours, a very pleasant trip with an unusually talkative farmer.

This man considered himself a middle-class farmer. When I asked him my question on how to separate the rich and poor among American farmers, he told me that it is not only landownership that determines the farmer's economic status. Added to this, one must know about the machinery and the number and quality of the pick-up trucks if one wants a good indicator of status in this western North Dakota farm country. The ownership of these together with farm size determines the farmer's economic status in the eyes of his neighbours. A rich farmer will always use new and big machines compared to poorer farmers. Ownership of big machines suggests the presence of a large chunk of land to cultivate. And in order to give the impression of

economic status, a poor farmer is tempted to drive himself deeper into debt by the purchase of machinery he can't afford.

My travel companion also confessed to me that a farmer like him also plays golf, a game that he is willing to pay \$50 at a time to play in a private country club. Not every farmer of this area could afford this kind of luxury. True or not, and I must admit this farmer enjoyed a good joke, it was the long contact and the working together at a task—in other words, participant observation—that opened new lines of communication for me.

In brief, ownership of land and the size and design of the house are not the most important criteria for identifying rich and poor farmers in the area as they would be in Nepal. It is the size and condition of the machinery that are the most important criteria in identifying the rich and poor farmers in the area.

The truth of Ortner's point hit home for me. She writes that in American social and cultural life there is "personal embarrassment about talking about money—about personal income, family resources or both. It has been said that most Americans would sooner discuss their sex lives than their incomes" (2003: 10). And this seems clearly to relate to the connection between property and the inner self in American cultural meaning. And yet, as my farmer friend showed me, one can also look for signs and indexes that are external to a person and come up with an answer to these questions. The point is that they can only be discovered through the reciprocity of fieldwork itself.

In rural Nepal visitors are an attraction. Local people want to see them, talk to them, or invite them to their houses during their stay in the village area. Except for a very few restricted areas, an anthropologist can travel anywhere and work freely in the place they have proposed to do research. Not only in rural areas, but also in urban places like Kathmandu, researchers have easy access to the houses of their research site. The people welcome any foreigner to their homes, even an anthropologist. Depending on the economic condition of the family, the visitor is entertained with a cup of tea or some food. There is no problem in talking with people and, while talking, many researchers will find that they are not confined to what they have written in their research proposal. Nobody bothers as to what they have written or where they going to publish their report or article or book. The concern of the local people about researchers is in their relationship with them, the manner of their behaviour, and the reciprocity that they bring to their dealings with people.

Conclusion

As I mention above, doing ethnographic field research in the United States of America is difficult for the people of developing countries for reasons such as lack of research money, lack of proper affiliation with a university, and the problems of getting clearance from the IRB. These are structural or infrastructural. Added to these are the more cultural difficulties such as those relating to obtaining access to households and family members, obtaining answers to straightforward questions, and other matters that connect to the ethos of individualism and privacy that prevails in American society.

As a whole, although American society is largely governed by democratic values and egalitarian principles, Americans see these values as being carried at the level of individuals out of any context. The result is largely individualistic and self-motivated practice in a person's day-to-day life. Each person is very much concerned about his or her own work. Personal boundaries, whether of the person as a physical being or as symbolised by property, are nearly sacred so that privacy is strictly maintained. It is extremely hard to know what others are thinking and doing within or outside the family. This kind of uncertainty about the attitude and behaviour of others, it seems to me, emphasises an inward direction and distrust of others. Thus one finds difficult it to talk with people unless one stays in the area for a good period of time.

In spite of all the difficulties and frustrations, I discovered that this kind of cross-cultural study is quite relevant to me as both an anthropologist and a Nepali citizen. It is hard to be more than suggestive in explaining why, but I have a few thoughts.

First, a research-based understanding of middle-class cultural currents in the United States of America may be a useful way of providing new insights on transformations within the growing middle class in Nepal itself (see Liechty 2003). In effect, my studies of American middle class culture place me in a position to think in terms of new large scale-patterns of globalisation, some of which we may expect to become increasingly germane to our own futures.

Another area of personal intellectual development is in the area of expanding methodology. The ethnographic frameworks and techniques that I have used in my American research are largely those which I apply in my research in Nepal. I expect to be able to develop a greater understanding of these methods through their application to a quite different context by understanding what modifications become necessary and what continuities

might be considered as universal in social science research. These are important to my work in Nepal as our own society continues on its path of rapid social change. But they also raise the issue of how research methods are themselves structured by the culture in which they originate. It may well be that the "legitimacy" of particular approaches or methods has as much to do with the political dominance of the country of their origin as to universally valid standards. It is at least a question worth asking, how much the concern with the individual outside of context in some social science grows from the cultural stress on individuals and privacy in American culture itself.

In a sense, I have conducted fieldwork in America from a distinctly Nepali perspective. Many of the frustrations I encountered were a product of that perspective coming up against another that was foreign to it. I believe that understanding and making the Nepali perspective explicit is essential to our ability to make American studies work in our own context. It will also prepare our own students in their understanding of the United States of America and help to forge an empirically based critique of trends of that country.

Note

1. Fieldwork and research for this paper was supported by a generous grant from the Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life, an Alfred P. Sloan Center for the Study of American Working Families. I especially want to thank Larry Root and Bob Bowen for their wise counsel and friendship in leading me into the initial experiences with American autoworkers in Michigan. I would also like to give my great thanks to Ms. Jana Bruce and Ms. Judy Baughn for all their administrative help over the years of my association with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Thanks to my home institution, the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, for approving the leave periods that allowed my visits to the United States. And, of course, I want to thank Tom Fricke for over 20 years of exhilarating intellectual debate, productive collaboration, and the best of friendships. All opinions expressed in this paper are my own, but nothing would have been written without each of these people.

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Appendix 1. Brief Notes on American Land Tenure System and Farming Practices

Land rent per acre:

It is both in cash and grains. Cash is normally \$23.0 and above per acre (depending upon the quality of land) and half to one third to the landowner from the total production of grains, according to my informant R. According to R, a landowner is better off if he leases his land for grains. However, most of the cultivated lands in this area are rented out for cash. According to A, the land rent in grain is only one third of the total production and this goes to the owner of land.

Crop rotation:

This is the basic feature of farming in this area. The ideal crop rotation has the same crop rotated into a given field every three years. But the crop rotation in this area usually follows a two-year cycle with the same crop rotated in each second year.

Crop cycle:

Single crop or mono-cropping pattern in the whole area. Normally cropping starts from April- May and most of the crops are harvested by August- September.

Typical Percentage of Total Crops Cultivated in the Area:

50 percent wheat

25 percent legumes

25 percent oil seeds (Normally, crambe, sunflower and canola are grown in this area as oil seeds. Soybeans are not grown in this area.)

Tilling:

The tractor is exclusively used for tilling and fertilizing the land. A good-sized tractor can till the land for seeding at the rate of up to 200 acres per day. Average tilling by a tractor is 170 acres a day. Thus, a farmer who owns 2000 acres of land needs at least 10 to 15 days of tilling, depending upon his size of the tractor.

Labor in Farm:

Sometimes, a farmer has to employ a laborer during the seeding and harvesting seasons of peak labor demand. At that time, a farmer pays up to \$10.0 an hour for the laborer. A laborer works up to 10 hours a day. Nevertheless, the farming is usually done exclusively by one's own family members. For example, A's farm, which is more than 3000 acres, is farmed by three family members: man, wife, son. They hire laborers only in an emergency. Likewise, the farm of B (the farm size is not known) is worked by both husband and wife. Their grown-up daughter who has finished her high school this year used to help in all work but has now gone away to college.

Division of Labor:

A grown-up son of the farmer A (the son is now in the first year of a nearby college) runs tractors for seeding and herbicide spraying on weeds. During the winter (November through March), he helps parents to feed cattle everyday. The woman is the home-maker. She does all the domestic chores including cooking, cleaning the house and courtyard, washing clothes, and kitchen-gardening. She also takes care of young calves (feeding them with bottled milk two times a day; there were three such calves who needed milk) and cutting grasses around the courtyard. When the need arises, she picks up a van to help her husband in the farm as well. In addition, she does the work of book-keeping, (keeping the record of everything of their income and expenses). The father works on the farm: tilling, seeding, applying herbicide, harvesting, baling the hay, and taking care of animals. During the summer, animals (the family has 100 cows with calves and four bulls) are left in their own pasturage areas. In one pasturage area, cattle are left about two weeks and then they are taken again to another pasturage area. During the winter, he feeds animals, hauls grain to the marketplaces and keeps up on book-keeping. The book-keeping gives the farmer an idea of which crops make or lose money. Normally, a farmer does not grow a crop in the following year if he has lost money on it.

Feeding the cattle during the summer:

Cattle are left in the pasturage area without any kind of shelter. A pond is dug out for drinking water if necessary. Otherwise, small ditches around the pasturage area keep enough water to feed the cattle. One bag of

minerals is left in a container in the middle of the pasturage area with a big cone of hard salt (it looks brown in color; I believe the salt is mixed with iron and iodine minerals). According to farmer A, the bag of minerals and the cone of salt last for 15 days for 100 head of cattle. The whole pasture area is fenced with a barbed wire to control the movement of cattle. In some areas, the wire is charged with electricity so that animals do not touch the wire so that fence is protected.

Feeding the cattle during the winter:

All the livestock are fed with hay during the winter (November through March). So a farmer needs a lot of hay to feed their animals during the winter.

Number of bulls in the ranch area

According to farmer A, a person can easily find out the number of cows owned by a farmer family if he asks how many bulls he owns. Normally, one bull is kept for 25 cows. The main purpose of keeping the bull is for mating the cow. No doubt, a young bull could mate 30-32 cows a year but the average is only 25.

Cropping

According to farmer A, cropping (seeding) started a little late this year; it started during the last week of April because of snow, rain and cool temperatures up to the first three weeks of April. Top-soils need adequate moisture for seeding.

Crops:

Only two types of wheat are grown in this area: spring wheat and winter wheat. Durum wheat is not grown in this area. Other crops grown are: Sorghum, barley, oats and corn. However, corn is little grown in this area. In addition to cereal crops farmers grow legumes, oil seeds, vegetables and alfalfa grass. The alfalfa grass is grown for feeding the cattle. According to A, it contains a good amount of protein (about 14%), which is considered good for cattle.

Market of grains

The ND farmers quote the grain market from three big cities of the Midwest: Chicago, Minneapolis and Kansas City. The everyday market price of grains of these big cities is hooked into their computer and they check the price of grains everyday.

**Appendix 2: Machinery and other Items owned and
used by a farm family**

- i) Tractors
- ii) Skid steer and loaders
- iii) Harvest equipment
- iv) Row crop equipment
- v) Tillage equipment (Planters, Plows)
- vi) Sprayers
- vii) Trucks
- viii) Trailers
- ix) Balers (New Holland Model 688 Roll Belt-for uniform bales weighing up to 2200 lbs)
- x) Rakers
- xi) Vehicles
- xii) Grain handling equipment
- xiii) Elevator and bin equipment
- xiv) Livestock and hay equipment(including the manure spreaders).
- xv) Mower (Grass Cutters)
- xvi) Scathes

Machinery is considered the real wealth of American farm families. The newer and the larger in size they are, the economically better off a farmer is considered over other farmers.

Other Possessions owned by the Family

Total land (in acre)	: 3198
Owned (see below)	: 127
Rented	: 3071

Pasture land(out of the total land) : about 700 acres from the rented land.

Livestock

Cows	: 100
Calves	: 100
Bulls	: 4
Television	: Two
Computer	: 1
Other (computer cum radar)	: 1(for checking weather and market).

Vehicles

Car : 1

Pick-up van : 3

All other agricultural machineries as mentioned above are kept by the family (size and how old they are is not known).

House (for Residence)

Basement with bathroom and toilet

First floor with bathroom, toilet, drawing room, bedroom and kitchen

Second floor with two bedrooms and toilet

The floor of the house is carpeted.

Two refrigerators

Two fridges

Woven, microwave

Washers and Dryers

In addition, the family has many barns, bodyshop (for repairing machineries), and grain bins located at various places of the farm.

AGENCY, AUTONOMY AND THE SHARED SEXUALITY: GENDER RELATIONS IN POLYANDRY IN NEPAL HIMALAYA

Youba Raj Luintel

Introduction

Polyandry is a system of a single woman sharing multiple men as husbands at a time. In fraternal polyandry, all the brothers in one generation share a common wife. In non-fraternal polyandry, a group of like-minded men from different households get married with a single woman.¹ The practice of polyandry has been reported in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Tibet. Exceptionally, it has also been reported in the Amazon forest of northwest Brazil (Peters and Hunt 1975). The existing literature on polyandry categorically highlights mainly three sets of explanation that account – collectively or individually – for the emergence/persistence of polyandry.

The first set of arguments claims that polyandry is a cultural response to a prolonged absence of males in the family - a phenomenon observed commonly in all polyandrous societies (Gough 1959, Prince Peter 1955). Polyandry is perceived, therefore, as a security measure for the rest of the family members because it keeps multiple males in the family so that at least one could stay at home (Berreman 1962, Kapadia 1955). Partly, polyandry is also perceived as a way of getting rid of the pressure of the “heavy bride price” (Majumdar 1955). As a practice of group marriage polyandry also keeps number of marriage to a minimum, thereby helps avoid the burden of bride price. Since multiple marriages mean diverse economic interests (which usually pose threats to the unity of the household), polyandry is also interpreted as a practice of keeping households away from the risks of friction and fission (Leach 1955).

The second set of arguments takes demographic reasons into account and looks at polyandry as a result of an originally higher sex ratio (Aiyappan

1935, Prakash 1964, Westermarck 1922). Rivers (1924, cited in Peters and Hunt 1975) argued that in the early days the practice of female infanticide resulted in the practice of polyandry. It is also said that polyandry is a coping strategy of keeping the population down to a desirable size (Goldstein 1971, 1976, Prince Peter 1963). The third set of arguments persuasively describes polyandry as a social response to extremely adverse economic conditions (Goldstein 1971, Westermarck 1922). It figures out polyandry as a survival strategy of the poor (Nakane 1966); a strategy of keeping the household property and estate consolidated (Majumdar 1962, Tambiah 1966); and a way of maintaining a pool of labour force together that would help cope with the persistent economic hardships (Kapadia 1955).

However, none of these scholars conceives polyandry as a complete social institution on its own right. The anthropological literature, for instance, is inclined more in seeking a pattern of progression from promiscuity to monogamy. Its common focus has been the structure and function of polyandry: how and why do people follow polyandry, how and why it continues to exist in some cultural groups, etc. Anthropological literature does not explain the internal dynamics of polyandry, nor does it look at polyandry from the vantage point of women.² It assumes that every household tends to maximize the well-being of all of its members – irrespective of their age and gender – either through altruism or through freely exercised choices. Assumptions like this explicitly neglect intra-household inequalities, such as gender.

Feminism, which has been critical to those unitary interpretations of anthropology, offers a new set of explanations in understanding the gendered terrain of power relations within a household. However, most of the feminists – except very few ones who deal with polygamy in African societies – appear to be unaware on matters of gender relations in households other than monogamous.³ Some prominent feminist anthropologists such as MacCormack and Strathern (1980), Mitchell and Oakley (1986), Moore (1988), Nicholson (1990), Ortner and Whitehead (1981), Reiter (1975), Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), and Thorne and Yalom (1982), for instance, do not even touch upon the case of polyandry in their discussions of gender in marriage, kinship and the family.

Hence, feminist discourse on gender and sexuality appears to have been confined on monogamy (which the Western feminism has successfully highlighted). The Western feminism inherently essentializes that an understanding of gender relations in monogamy mirrors gender relations of

all types, including polyandrous. Therefore, it does not recognize that women's subordination has multiple forms. In polyandry, for instance, a single "patriarch," one as perceived in monogamy, does not exist. The present paper challenges those essentialist positions and ventures into polyandry to see how power is gendered in it. This paper begins by arguing that gender relation in polyandry is structurally different than that in monogamy, primarily because a centrally located single male figure does not exist there. To be specific, it attempts to explore whether polyandrous women have equal power, agency and autonomy like men with respect to sexuality and access to resources.

This paper primarily derives from a previous research I had conducted among the Nyinba (see Luintel 1998). I stayed in Nyinba Gaon for about one month (September 1997) to collect household ethnographic information followed by one and a half month (mid-May to June 2000) for observation and verification. During both these periods, I was able to interact with 19 (of 23) Nyinba women and 14 (of 56) men who were in polyandrous union at the time. For the sake of comparison, I interviewed with some other randomly selected men and women as well who were not in polyandrous union. To get a deeper insight into the issues some key-informant interviews were accomplished and some case studies compiled. I had two Nyinba interpreters (one male, another female) to assist my work in the field.

Theoretical Framework

The existing literature on polyandry is too general and theoretically less informed insofar as the "gendered regime of power"⁴ is concerned. In order to develop a working framework of analysis, an attempt has been made to examine the concepts of marriage, property, power and sexuality. This critical analysis has been based mainly on the debates going around two schools of thought, viz. the socialist feminism, and the postmodern feminism.

Socialist Feminism and the Issues of Marriage and Property

Socialist feminism is a highly diverse cluster of theoretical writings. It brings together the Marxian concept of "class oppression" and the radical feminist concept of "gender oppression." Thus, the common phrase socialist feminists often use is "capitalist patriarchy." "Socialist feminism develops a portrait of social organization in which the public structures of economy, polity, and ideology interact with the intimate, private processes of human reproduction,

domesticity, sexuality, and subjectivity to sustain a *multifaceted system of domination*" (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1996:480, italics original). For the socialist feminists, the primary reference for the analysis of power relations in the family has been Engels' (1972) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Engels' important contribution lies to his postulation of an earlier stage of a "sex egalitarian" society that inspired some feminists very much.

Engels' main argument is that whatever status women had in the past times, it was derived primarily from her position in the household (Tong 1998). Women's work was vital for the survival of the community so long as production was the activity inside the home. Once a large-scale production (primarily of the domestication of animals and breeding of herds) took place, the location of production shifted to outside the home. This shift led to an entirely new source of wealth for the groups. As a result, not only the value of women's work and her production decreased, more importantly, the status of women in society shrunk too. Hence Engelian explanation identifies social organization of production as largely responsible for women's subordination. The emergence of private property and the shift of inheritance from matrilineal to patrilineal lines, for example, explain the transition of the family from the state of "mother's right" to patriarchy (Tong 1998:103). Therefore, socialist feminists argue that if women are to be emancipated from their husbands, women must first become economically independent of men (Tong *ibid*). In this point, socialist feminists come closer to liberal feminists in the sense that the later too gives an exclusive importance to women's economic self-reliance.

Postmodern Feminism and the Issues of Power and Sexuality

Postmodernism is a critical approach to philosophy and meta-narratives of human history. It refers to a range of overlapping positions, which does not have one fixed meaning (Weedon 1987).⁵ In this section, I attempt to know how and to what extent are postmodern conceptions of power and sexuality helpful to understand the dynamics of power between women and men in general and gender relations in polyandry in particular.

To Foucault power does not have any primary existence of a central point. There is not a unique source of sovereignty from which forces would emanate. Power is not an institution, nor a structure. Neither is power a certain strength we are endowed with. Nor is it something that is acquired,

seized or shared; or one holds on to or allows slipping away (Foucault 1980:94). Then, what power is all about? According to Foucault:

power must be understood...as the multiplicity of *force relations* immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the *process* which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the *support* which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions or contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the *strategies* in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (Foucault 1980:92-93, italics mine).

Foucault further says that power is a moving substrate of force relations: relations based on co-operation as well as contestation and disruption. For him power is relational that operates in a "capillary fashion" (from below), and finds a shifting and unstable expression in networks and alliances (Pringle and Watson 1996:55). It is based on patterns of interaction and assertion. The question is not who holds it but who asserts it in different sets of relations, which Foucault calls "force relation." Power has a multiple, unstable, contested, precarious and relational nature, which, as Foucault assumes, permeates every social relation.

In the Foucauldian conceptualization of power, "resistance" appears almost parallel to it. Foucault says, "where there is power, there is resistance" (1980:95). Since power is omnipresent, the points of resistance too are everywhere in the power network. He says, resistance is inscribed in power irreducibly. Hence resistance too is distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots or focuses of which are spread over time and space in varying densities (Foucault 1980:96). In other words, the existence of power depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance.

For the purpose of this paper, power has been operationalized as a manifestation of agency and autonomy of women and men within a household. Agency has been defined as the capacity of individuals to ultimately decide what action to take. Autonomy refers to the ability to obtain information and use it as a basis of making decisions about one's private

concerns and that of one's intimates (Dyson and Moore 1983). In agrarian societies such as Nyinba Gaon, individual autonomy (female autonomy in particular) depends largely on the degree of constraints imposed by kinship and marriage relationship as well as on the ability to inherit or otherwise acquire, retain and dispose of property, and some independent control of one's own sexuality.

In feminist writing "sexuality" refers to an aspect of personal and social life that has erotic significance: not only erotic desires, practices and identities but also the discourses and social patterns which construct erotic possibilities (Jackson and Scott 1996). Essentialists and biological determinists argue that women's sexual (i. e., biological) difference from men is the main cause of women's oppression (Rubin 1984). But feminist constructivists counter-argue that it is not biology but oppression that produces sexual difference (see Wieringa, forthcoming). As the latter argue, sexuality is a social construction produced historically and varies cross-culturally. They do not consider sexual behaviour as fixed, but fluid and variable. Foucault maintains that sexuality must not be seen as a drive, which is alien and natural, but as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power (Foucault 1980:103).

In postmodern debates on sexuality, Foucault's work has been the main impetus that problematizes the "regulatory mechanism which circumscribes the sexualized body" (McNay 1992:11). Sexuality is a site that shapes, reproduces, articulates and transforms gender relations. Issue of sexuality is, therefore, integral in the whole spectrum of power relations between women and men. Sexuality as a concept offers important analytical framework in analysing the construction of gender regime of power. (In polyandry it is more so where a single woman accommodates with multiple co-husbands.) Foucault argues that sex is a focal point of the exercise of power because it exercises control over the human body (Weedon 1987:118), which he calls "the discursive constitution of the body" (Foucault 1980). Hence, the constructivist conceptualization of sexuality offers a potentially creative and flexible analytical perspective in understanding power relationships between women and men.

To conclude, with this review, I find postmodern feminism as a suitable framework of analysis with respect to the issues of power and sexuality. Nevertheless, its overemphasis on gender and body leaves out some equally important notions, such as marriage, property and the gender division of labour. I, therefore, complement it by drawing some insights from socialist

feminism and applying Engels' notions of material conditions of life in understanding the dynamics of gender relations in polyandry.

Locating Gender in the Working of Polyandry

Polyandry in Nyinba Gaon

Nyinba polyandry is fraternal. Usually, a woman goes through a marriage ceremony with one of the several brothers;⁶ others could join her as co-husbands later. If one of the brothers decides not to join her, no one can force him. If he gets into another marriage, usually he is expelled from the home whether or not he had joined the common wife at any time before. In such a case, he has no customary rights to claim over the household property and estate.

Located in the remote and inaccessible northwest border of Nepal adjacent to Tibet, Humla is one of the poorest districts in Nepal with the smallest per capita land holding and the lowest level of human development (NESAC 1998). The study site is a high mountain valley at the center of the district. There are several small and clustered hamlets, located on gentle to steppe slopes approximately 10,000 feet above sea level. Although one finds many Tibetan settlements, the Nyinba in particular have an exclusive concentration in four villages, called Bargaon, Buraunse, Limatang and Todpa.⁷

The Nyinba is a migrant Tibetan community. Their legends exemplify the glory of their ancestors, and link the history of their arrival as far as twelfth century. Nyinba legends commonly trace ties with high caste Hindus in terms of kinship (Levine 1988:29). However, the Hindu (Levine 1988:24) ranks the Nyinba lower in the caste hierarchy.

Nyinba legends also reveal many facets of the past economic and demographic life in Humla and their relations with the neighbouring Hindus. One popular Nyinba legend says: *Aáth aáo Thihál, chaubis aáo Barkháng* (lit. means "there were [just] eight households in Thehe, in Bargaon there were 24"). Thehe is a nearest hamlet next to Bargaon (a 15-minute walking distance) inhabited by monogamous Hindus. Although no one knows exactly which period of history this particular legend refers to, by 1997, however, the total number of households in Thehe was well over 300 while that of Bargaon was only 48. If we compare the population of these two villages over the course of time, it may appear that the population growth in polyandrous society is much lower than that of the monogamous society.

I have seen and talked to many Thehe inhabitants doing wage labour in Nyinba Gaon. This was completely a reverse case compared to anecdotal observations of some five decades before when the poor Nyinba used to go to Thehe for wage earning. Due to monogamy in Thehe, each incidence of inheritance meant successive fragmentation of the household property, which the Nyinba managed to escape successfully because of polyandry. The Nyinba were also able to deploy several brothers in different production fronts. Under monogamy it was not possible for the Thehe villagers. The end result was successive impoverishment of Thehe households vis-à-vis the Nyinba who had been prospering over the years.

The Nyinba Kinship

In polyandry, the female figure is at the center of the kinship relations within the family. She is surrounded by her multiple husbands. She addresses each of the husbands by a common term *khimjang*. The children from these alliances would recognize the group of brothers as the group of fathers. They address all of them as *aaya* (using suffix if the fathers are too many). In a similar way, irrespective of paternity, all brothers treat all of the children equally and use the common term to address them: *puja* for son and *pu(n)* for daughter (see Appendix 1 for kinship terminology).

Most important to Nyinba kinship is what anthropologists call "bifurcate merging." In Nyinba society, while all the father's brothers are grouped with the father and addressed by the same term (*aaya*),⁸ the mother's brother is, however, treated somewhat differently and given a separate term (*aajang*). Since these terms (*aaya* and *aajang*) bifurcate the collateral lines (i. e., father and mother's sides), and merge one of them (here, father's brothers) with the lineal kin (i.e., father, again), it is called "bifurcate merging" (see Lowie 1950 for an elaboration on the notion of bifurcate merging).

Bifurcate merging is important for the Nyinba in two senses. First, it locates all fathers on an equal footing (as reflected in the use of a common term). The Nyinba do not have an individualizing term to single out the *pater* from the group of fathers. Since any one of mother's co-husbands could be a real father ("genitor"), all brothers in father's generation are, therefore, equally recognised as "likely fathers." Second, the system of bifurcate merging has multiple implications on kinship relations at secondary and tertiary levels regarding property and sexuality. So far as a Nyinba marriage is concerned, bifurcate merging implies much, as it separates an ego's mother's brother (*aajang*) from the group of father's brothers (*aaya*), thereby

allowing the ego to marry with the *aajang*'s children. The result is the practice of cross-cousin marriage, a practice the Nyinba preferred customarily.⁹

Regarding the collateral sides, the Nyinba use different terms for brother and sister's children. To the brother's children a male ego applies exactly the same term he uses for his own children (see Appendix 1). But a sister's children are addressed by distinct terms. An ego calls *chhou* for sister's son and *chhau(n)* for sister's daughter. Once again, different terms used to denote the children of equal collateral distance can be understood in the context of social organization of polyandry. In Nyinba polyandry, a brother's children might mean one's own children if the ego is under co-husbandship, a case never applicable to a sister's children.

For the Nyinba, "descent and kinship are genealogical matters which are grounded in theories of hereditary transmissions" (Levine 1988:38). The Nyinba express a number of ideas regarding how property inheritance should be managed. Its underlying system is obviously embedded in kinship relations. At the symbolic level, the Nyinba state that *ru* ("bone") passes in pure form from father to child through the medium of sperm. As the Nyinba believe it, women also have a similar bone as men have but she can pass it to their children only through the medium of *sha* ("flesh"). For Nyinba, it is "bone" that matters more than "flesh." Consequently, men inherit property and women receive "proper maintenance" relative to it. Hence, as in other societies, gender inequality and the corresponding power relations between women and men is justified at a symbolic level.

Although the eldest brother acts as the "social father" for all the children begotten by a marriage, in the daily life, the Nyinba tend to identify the "genitor" also. The main responsibility of designating paternity is that of the wife. It is through this responsibility that women's autonomy within the household is partially established. Designation of paternity to one against other co-husbands is a matter of politics through which she could tactfully share a sense of marital belongingness to many co-husbands. She could even play "tricks" in designating paternity to the particular husband who has grievances of being sexually neglected within polyandrous complexities. By Nyinba perception, assigning paternity is also an "excuse" for women's illegitimate and extra-marital liaisons, if any. By designating paternity she could "legitimize" it. This is one of the privileges for the Nyinba women to strengthen her position within the power hierarchy of the household.

In a very few cases, paternity is also designated in the order of birth, when the first child is attached to the eldest brother, second to the next and so on. It rotates back to the eldest again if the number of children exceeds the number of fathers, which is a very rare case.¹⁰

Fraternal Solidarity and the Female-Head

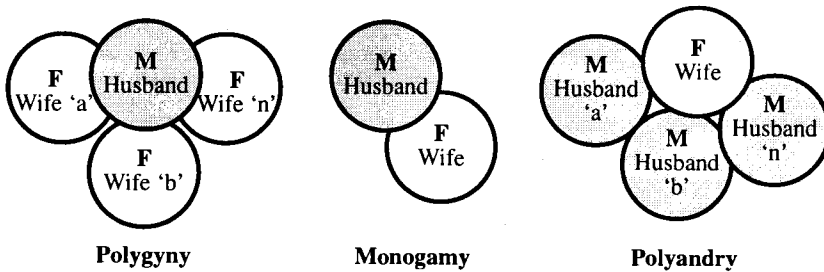
Levine (1980) argues that an ideological emphasis on the equality of the brothers is central to the Nyinba perception of polyandrous marriage and is evidenced in interpersonal relationships. It is considered wrong for any brother to try to gain a monopoly over the woman's attention and services (Levine 1980:287). Domestic authority is customarily exercised by *aaju* (the eldest brother). He is considered as *dag-pa*, the male-head of the household. The customary leadership of *dag-pa* is established firmly. The marriage provides legal recognition to his name. For administrative purposes the children are "registered" as his children. The estate and property are his property. By virtue of this authority, the *dag-pa* may manage himself to stay at home the whole year. It has two direct benefits to him: first, he can have regular physical and emotional intimacy with the wife for most of the time. Second, staying at home and looking after the estate is not only relatively an easier job but it is also a source of authority both inside and outside the household. Although some *dag-pas* take advantage of monopolizing this authority, there are others who pay much attention to the comfort and convenience of younger brother(s).¹¹

Nevertheless, the *dag-pa* has no absolute rights: neither sexual (such as, regarding access to the wife), nor reproductive (such as, over the children) or otherwise (over estate and property, for example). It seems that Nyinba polyandry is a system of power balance and operates in mutual trust where individuals (both male and female) sacrifice their personal comforts. On the whole, there does not appear a monolithic center of power. For example, the *dag-pa* cannot avoid the *dag-mo* (female-head). The *dag-mo*, too, cannot avoid other co-husbands because of their respective contribution to the prosperity of the household. Instead, if the eldest brother is not "smart," another clever one may emerge as the de facto *dag-pa*. Since the *dag-paship* is not a position, but a set of expected roles and duties, the role of *dag-mo* in Nyinba household, is much more vital for the Nyinba social life.

Polyandry without fraternal solidarity can neither sustain, nor make any sense. It is a system of fragile balance maintained within contests and negotiations of power that largely depends on the extent of mutual trust and

co-operation. At the center of this lies *dag-mo*, the female-head, as the pivot. Due to her centripetal role, Nyinba males consider each woman as a potential nucleus for a separate property (thereby, separate family). Presence of more than one woman in the family therefore logically transforms the direction of power towards centrifugal character. In order to avoid family break ups (and thereby minimizing the potential partition of labour power and property), they prefer to adhere to the customary practice of “one marriage for one generation.” Thus, because of the presence of a single woman amidst many men, she is positioned at the center of kinship within the family (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of men and women in different forms of marriage



In a Nyinba household, if there is any one having extensive information and knowledge on domestic affairs, it is *dag-mo*. She is the locus of communication and medium of contact for all the co-husbands. Regarding property, the *dag-mo* has access to, if not ownership of, all production frontiers: trade, transhumance and agriculture. She can have control over every economic activity throughout the year. Despite the fact that the *dag-pa* (male-head) has recognised authority in all the decisions, in practice, the *dag-mo* has pragmatic power to influence such decisions. Field observation clearly reveals that very rarely *dag-pa* undertakes the risks of taking decisions without consultation to *dag-mo*. Thus it appears that the *dag-pa* is a titular head vis-à-vis the *dag-mo*, as some Nyinba maintain it.

The Gendered Terrain of Nyinba Property System

Property is not just a matter of subsistence, but an effective force of social relations. There are shifting, dynamic and plural relations between women and men that involve economic co-operation and support as well as

accommodation, resistance and contest. When we look at the economic aspect of gender relations from the Foucauldian perspective, we see a clear connection between power and property. Historically, property system has been the underlying mechanism of social organization. Any shift in source and direction of economic activities has brought corresponding changes in the patterns of sexuality. Likewise, property has been the basis of Nyinba polyandry where women's economic interests are either ignored or marginalized for the sake of the so-called fraternal solidarity.

In search of the material basis of gender relations in polyandry, I would attempt to explore the gender division of labour. The gender division of labour is not simply a division of productive and reproductive activities by sex. More comprehensively, it is the totality of social relations between men and women together in a production system (Leibowitz 1986). It seems that a particular form of social organization produces specific form of gender division of labour which, in turn, reproduces a corresponding form of socially mandated gender relations.

In Nyinba society, power permeates in property in the form of gender inequality. What matters is the way economic relations between women and men are shaped. In the present study very simple questions were posed: How is property shared within a household and how is it handed over to the next generation? Are there any regulating functions of kinship regarding all these processes? How gender relations are shaped due to differential access to property and different gender roles? What linkages are there between the domains of property and sexuality? These are some of the questions that pave the way to establish a link between power, property and gender relations.

An Overview on Property System

The Nyinba evaluate a household's wealth primarily through the size of its land-holdings and the size of herds and cattle. Ownership of valuables, comprised of money, gold, ornaments, turquoise, coral beads, brass utensils, carpets, silk and ceremonial clothing, etc. follows next (Levine 1988:233). Agriculture, transhumance and trade are the three main pursuits of subsistence in Nyinba Gaon. Each of these needs a full-time labour. Agriculture is vulnerable due to the high elevation, steep slope, poor soil fertility and low levels of rainfall, etc. Although better than other Humli villages in terms of agricultural productivity, Nyinba Gaon is still not self-sufficient in food supply. An important source of cash is transhumance, called *pakhar* (breeding and selling animals). The Nyinba domesticate a

relatively larger number of cattle and herds than their Hindu neighbours. Sheep remains the single most important animal the Nyinba keep. Of the total livestock (2352 in 1997), sheep and goats occupied 83 percent, followed by horses and *jhuma* (female yak) (8 percent), and cows (4.5 percent).

For the Nyinba, trade and transaction (called *chhalam-chhongdo*) are a matter of pride. Among other things, the social status of the family very much depends on the extent of its involvement in *chhalam-chhongdo*. Long distance trade, usually seasonal if not year-round, characterizes it. Traditionally it involves a huge number of pack animals; slow but an incessant movement of "on-the-way transactions" (bartering grain for salt, for instance). Involvement in trade demands a large number of adult males followed by a sufficient number of herds and cattle, and skillful "trades(wo)manship." It is possible only to those who follow polyandry. Monogamous households cannot arrange all these complications because usually they have just one or two adult male(s).

Sex Roles and Gender Stereotyping

Two decades ago, a multi-community study in Nepal examined the gender division of labour and the time spent on work in rural households. The study revealed that in *conventional economic activities* (animal husbandry, manufacturing, and paid employment) the actual level of women's contribution was closer to 80 percent of men's. When *subsistence activities* (such as food processing, water collection, etc) are added, it goes to roughly equal to those of men. And when *domestic works* (washing, cleaning, cooking, etc.) were added, women were found to be working 3.5 hrs. more than men (per day 11 hrs. for female and 8.5 hrs. for male) (Acharya and Bennett 1981:159). In a similar way, an adult Nyinba woman works two hours more (8.80 hrs.) than her male counterpart (6.80 hrs.) on an average day (Levine 1988:156).

Nyinba women usually concentrate on agriculture, the primary source of their income. They contribute far more time in agricultural tasks than do men. By contrast, men specialize in diverse nonfarm tasks (Levine 1988:205). They are more apt in trading than in agriculture. The pride of Nyinba is trade, which only men do, while the work depreciated is agriculture, which mainly women do. For men, involvement in agriculture is sporadic, and the demands of trade take many of them away from home for months.

Men are responsible for ploughing and planting seeds at regular intervals throughout the agricultural season. They also build and maintain terrace walls. Nevertheless, women engage in a broader range of agriculture tasks and shoulder the major responsibility. Their tasks require regular labour for longer periods, such as weeding, and those considered distasteful, such as preparing compost. Weeding is particularly time-consuming. Levine (1988:207) estimates that men's work in a plot of field takes a day to plow, while it takes a woman from five to fifteen days to weed thoroughly in the same plot of land. Some crops require two or even three cycles of weeding.

Women are engaged in agriculture works throughout the year except during the yawning winter season (December to March), when the ground is covered by snow. Then they spend more time in food-processing and cloth preparation for the family - tasks left over from the summer. Women carry loads on their back, while men use animals to carry their loads. Men are responsible for activities requiring greater strength, while women concentrate on activities requiring slower and sustained labour and finer work. Women are often provided with tasks of preparing compost, manuring the land, cleaning cloths, washing dishes, etc. Women's involvement in those "unpleasant or polluting tasks" is explained by their lower status (Levine 1988:211). Men rely on women not only for certain kinds of agricultural work, but also for the processing of food and its preparation and other domestic activities that must be performed on a daily basis throughout the year. Men undertake some of these tasks occasionally, but not very happily (Levine 1988). Because of this, households cannot survive without the labour of adult women.

Prosperity and the Rhythm of Movement

The Nyinba require deploying labour activity widely and in different frontiers simultaneously. Involvement in a single sector means impoverishment, which the Nyinba would never accept. One person stays with the cattle in high altitude pastures, another might follow the herds towards the lowland winter pasture. Still a third one stays in the village looking after children, the elderly, the estate and the property. Hence, they are involved in a delicately balanced rhythm of movement for trade and transhumance (and, occasionally pilgrimage), which is possible if they are under polyandry (see case one). Thus, every year Nyinba men spend a considerable length of time away from their homes.

Case One

Sonam, a resident of Nyinba Gaon, has five members in his family. He had two grandfathers: Nagder and Tashi. Each of them married monogamously. As they were already poor, monogamy led both of them towards further poverty. At the time, while other households used to keep hundreds of sheep, Nagder and Tashi had no more than 40 each. Sonam had three fathers: Namgela, Tundup and Chhawang. All of them married polyandrously. By the way, their father-in-law became "heirless," so by kinship tradition, all of his property came to them. Besides, Chhawang got a job in Nepal Police; Tundup used to engage in *pakhar*, while Namgela, the elder brother, was looking after the household and agriculture. Tundup became successful to increase the number of sheep up to 300. Around 1978, the number of sheep reached 400 and jhopa (yak oxen) 25. In his fathers' generation Sonam's household became famous as one of the rich Nyinba households in Nyinba Gaon. Sonam himself had four brothers. Of them, the eldest died. So Sonam had to take responsibility of *pakhar*, so far Tundup (one of his fathers) was undertaking. Unfortunately, Norbu, his elder brother, appeared slanderous. He began to loiter in India, engaged in gambling, prostitution and other addictions. To meet the expenses, he began to sell the sheep. It is estimated that of the herd of 400 sheep, he sold at least half. (By that time each sheep used to be sold at approximately US\$ 40.) In 1990, Namgela, one of Sonam's fathers, died. After it, the family disintegrated: Sonam got married monogamously, Norbu and Chhiring, however, managed to stay in polyandry. (Consequently, the whole property including land, herd and cattle was to be divided.) After this, Sonam could not maintain the entire businesses alone. He sold 50 sheep of his part. Norbu and Chhiring too sold at least 150 sheep of their common share. Process of selling continued successively in both sides. During 1997 Sonam owned just 12 sheep, while Norbu and Chhiring had even not a single. For Nyinba it has become a reference case to show how Nyinba prosperity is gained and ruined because of different marriage systems.

Male mobility fulfills many requirements. First, it eliminates the possibility of sex jealousy among brothers. Second, it reduces the number of family members depending on the limited domestic subsistence production. Third, outside involvement maximizes total output. It is one of the means of economic prosperity that makes it possible for Nyinba to maintain the "pride

of polyandry.” Otherwise, they would remain as poor as their Hindu neighbours.¹² The gender implication of all this is that men are widely informed; they maintain extensive outside contacts and are proud of being engaged in such networks and trust groups. They also glamorize their activity of trade. Women, on the contrary, are confined to housework and the farms, which the Nyinba give less value.

Kinship and Women's Economic Exclusion

The Nyinba accept that the animals and other material goods do enhance a standard of living, but unlike land these are “impermanent” resources. Movable properties are not considered important so far as maintaining *trongbat* status is concerned.¹³ The logic is that such property can be easily sold or even given away in daughter's dowry. For the Nyinba, land provides a principal source of subsistence. It gives a household name (thereby, fame). Land is not available for sale any more, since the best areas were put into production generations ago.

Nyinba is obviously a patrilineal society. Therefore, the inheritance of property takes place through the male line. But the absolute rights to lifelong membership accrue to all children born to any married partner in the household. It is unconditional (Levine 1988). In polygynous polyandry,¹⁴ as in Chumik (another polyandrous society in Mustang District, see Schuler, 1987), a Nyinba daughter from the first wife would get “an unusually good dowry.” (However, the estate would go to the second wife's son, if any.) Thus there is a precedence of son over daughter, irrespective of whether he is from the first or second wife. The same does not apply to the daughter.

Second, in practice, it appears that children usually remain with their mother in case of a divorce (Schuler 1987:105). Ironically, it is the father who reserves rights to property. A divorcee woman gets nothing from her husband(s) except her own dowry back. The woman who is a widow cannot sell or bequeath any of it. She has to “keep” her husband's estate so long as the children are grown up. It is the later who will have full rights to the property of the deceased father. Third, while sons succeed absolutely to head the household and estate, daughters only receive a dowry when married (or “lifelong maintenance” if never wed). The quantity and the value of dowry vary considerably, depending on the resources and generosity of the parents. In most cases the dowry consists of kitchen utensils, brass pots, woollen blankets, leather overcoat, and pack animals such as horses, female yaks, sheep, etc.¹⁵

Of the 19 polyandrous women (of the 23 in total), 10 did not get a dowry of any sort. It might be attributed to the higher rates of "love marriage" than "arranged" ones. One partial explanation for the higher rate of love marriage is to avoid burdens of dowry and other ritual expenses. Of the 19 female respondents, five reported that their dowry had already been merged in the household property, which they could reclaim if they wished. In the remaining cases, there was no record at all. When asked, did they feel any sense of economic security with a large dowry; all women replied negatively. One of them volunteered to remark "you would find no Nyinba woman feeling safe on the grounds that she had a good dowry." All of them, however, acknowledged that dowry amount mattered at the time of a daughter's marriage, when mothers would be willing to add to a daughter's dowry on her own behalf.

In conclusion, land followed by possession of herds, cattle and other valuables constitute the form of property in Nyinba Gaon. Although land is a valued property, what attracts more now is trade and transaction (*Chhahalam-chhongdo*). Nyinba women devote more time and energy in agricultural tasks that are tedious, slow and economically less rewarding. Nyinba men, on the other hand, apt more in a rhythm-based cycle of trade and transaction. Those are charming, outward-oriented and profit making enterprises. Nyinba women have more or less equal access to property with their male counterparts. So far control and inheritance of property is concerned, conventionally males (especially the elder ones) enjoy exclusive rights. Nonetheless, polyandrous Nyinba women do not feel the sense of economic insecurity as much as their monogamous Hindu neighbours, partly because property is owned and inherited collectively.

Diverse Sexuality, Wider Choices: Power-Pleasure Spiral in Polyandry

Locating agency and autonomy in sexuality is a complex issue. Foucault draws our attention to a large set of productive power relations operating throughout the social body which constitutes the subject of modern sexual experience (Sawicki 1991). As Foucault argues, power has not operated primarily by denying sexual expression but by creating forms of sexuality practiced in the society. In this paper I argue that power in Nyinba sexuality is more productive than repressive. A Nyinba perception of sexuality is that it is not only for reproduction but for pleasure as well, as reflected in their multiple forms of sexuality. Nyinba sexuality is open, flexible and multiple.

It does not have sexual taboos as much as the Hindu neighbours have. For both men and women there is enough scope for sexual choice, negotiation and resistance (not only among partners but also between spouses). Nyinba polyandry is so rich in extra-marital sexuality that girls and boys, men and women have enough space for making choice and taking decisions.

Marriage Rules and Mate Selection

The Nyinba have a multiple forms of marriage. There are some cases where the family has only one son, thus the question of being polyandrous is not an issue. In other cases, a clear understanding is developed that the entire group of brothers would share a wife right from the moment marriage takes place. Still in some other cases, one of the brothers (not necessarily the eldest) leads the marriage rituals (with or without consultation or presence of the others) and "brings the wife," whom the others could share if they wish. Hence, some marriages are monogamous originally, later leading to polyandry; others are polyandrous right from the beginning. There might be some cases currently monogamous, but were polyandrous by origin. In such cases one of the co-husbands expires. There are many cases where brothers sharing a wife split off and (re)marry monogamously. In such a case, polyandry breaks up due to fraternal dislike or mistrust. As a result, what was once polyandry breaks into monogamy.

Since the Nyinba follow the practice of ethnic endogamy, they cannot go beyond four Nyinba villages for marriage. The Nyinba also follow a rule of *nyen* (cross-cousin) marriage. This is, however, a customary preference. In practice, an overwhelming majority of Nyinba marriage is non-cross-cousins. For example, of the 89 ever married women in Nyinba Gaon (in 1997), only seven had cross-cousin spouse.¹⁶ A vast majority (84 per cent) of marriage was *samthache* (love marriage), followed by *paklen* (arranged) five per cent and the rest either *jari* (elopement), *dyakcha* (marriage by capture) or *syuna* (informal celebration).¹⁷ One possible explanation for the high rate of love marriage, including elopement, is that the families involved could avoid the burden of dowry and other expenses such as lavish feasts, etc.¹⁸ A love marriage offers a short-cut and economic way of avoiding ritually tiring formalities of arranged marriage. Although, due to the traditional prestige issues, *paklen* marriage is preferred in principle, actually lesser and lesser number of people are actually following it.

Marital Sexuality and Women's Autonomy

Among the Nyinba, marriage is usually patrilocal and normally either monogamous or polyandrous, followed by a few cases of polygyny. Unlike the Tibetan practice, bi-generational polyandry (father and son sharing a spouse)¹⁹ was not found in Nyinba Gaon. Polygynous polyandry (two or more brothers sharing more than one wife simultaneously) was also not found. As in Limi, another Humli Tibetan village, bilateral cross-cousin marriage was valued but rarely followed in practice.

In Nyinba Gaon, 23 of the 73 current marriages recorded were polyandrous (Luintel 1998).²⁰ The 23 polyandrous marriages included 23 females and 56 males. This means each polyandrous marriage accommodated approximately 2.43 males. Two husbands sharing a wife was the most popular (16 cases) form of polyandry. There were also cases of three husbands (four cases) and even four husbands (three cases). Tambiah (1966) found up to seven husbands for one wife among the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka, which was not the case among the Nyinba.

The eldest brother usually sleeps on the main bed in the kitchen, called *mahang*. Customarily, he gets priority in having sex with the wife. This is reflected by the fact that the wife is supposed to sleep in his bed. The junior brothers usually sleep in other rooms. Younger brothers will have access to her but later, in order of seniority, if it is applicable. Sometimes, they might have to wait a long (couple of weeks) for their turn.

It is the Nyinba belief that no two siblings should sleep in a single bed at a time. It might bring "ill health, loss of herds, loss of profit in trade and such other harms." They could easily tolerate "sharing mouth"²¹ or even intercourse (with common wife or girl friend), but never a bed. So, logically, each brother has to sleep separately.²² Besides, for many reasons, access to wife is not a serious problem for them. First, every year almost all (except one) adult Nyinba male spend most of the months away from home. Thus, the possibility of confusion, conflict and jealousy regarding sex is apparently reduced. Second, in case more than one husband happens at home at one time, the Nyinba have a customary norm that the arriving brother has the first right to be with the wife. In such a case, the one who was at home goes to the village, usually after dinner, and would come back late at night. By that time the wife is expected to have been occupied by the arriving husband already.

Third, if there are two or more husbands staying at home for a longer period (say, for example, a couple of weeks), this is, of course, the most inconvenient time for them. In such a case, the wife has two choices. Usually,

she has to set a rule of sleeping with one husband for a couple of nights, and joining another subsequently. Unfortunately, sometimes it happens that the junior co-husband is too aggressive and impatient to wait for his turn. In such a case, the wife has to "understand" him. The only option, she has, is to visit each husband by turn within a single night so long as she feels physically capable and psychologically strong.

In polyandry, a single rule for sexual arrangement does not work for all the time and in all circumstances (Levine 1988:151-152). It is the wife who has to strategize and deploy a set of alternatives, specific to situations. It is the "duty" of the wife to share not only sex but also emotions among all so as not to let the situation of fraternal trust and solidarity become disintegrated. Despite her "fair deal" with and sincerity to all the co-husbands, problems do arise (see case two). If there is perceived or real discrimination against particular husband(s), its repercussions appear in other ways. No brother complains directly that there has been an unfair access to the wife. Exceptionally, if the one who had "first brought the wife" has grievances, he might seek his prerogative over her and challenge the other brothers (including the elder) to show their caliber by "bringing a wife" of their own.

Case Two

Dolma, a resident of Nyinba Gaon, has a problem regarding "who (husband or wife) should approach first" for sex? During her marriage with Nurputashi she was told that she would have to accommodate two brothers (Nurputashi and Rabdan) as co-husbands. Dolma was first approached by Nurputashi, the elder husband. She hoped that Rabdan too would approach her, which he never did. Dolma thinks that it is husband who should approach first in matter of sexual relations. So she never thought of approaching first. Now the case has been complicated. She is 25 years already; her two co-husbands are 24 and 23 years, respectively. Since, Rabdan never tried to share her sexually during five years of their union, Dolma suspects that he might have an outside affair whom he wants to marry. She says, "I would never allow this home to be partitioned. If Rabdan intends to bring another wife, he should support her at his own dispense. I have been trying to receive him sexually and emotionally. It is he who never approached me." Unlike Dolma, Rabdan has different sort of complaint. He reacts, "How could I accept Dolma as my wife, so long as she never comes to me. She was formally married with Nurputashi, not with me. By the way if I approach her now, she would immediately publicize it and push me under

pressure to accept her forever. How can I accept the much senior woman as my wife? She is worried recently more because she could not beget a child from Nurputashi."

Levine's (1988) observation is quite true when she writes that most Nyinba women initially like the eldest husband more regarding sex. The reasons are several: the two are often close in age, and usually the first sexual partners (within at least that marital union). Later years, women are apt to turn to younger husbands who are likely to be "sexually more attractive" by then (Levine 1988). Sometimes the one very young in age and possibly even sexually socialized right from the beginning by herself becomes the most affectionate partner later in her life. Despite it, many of my polyandrous female respondents (12 out of 19) found the eldest husband more "reliable" of all, since unlike the others he was not likely to (re)marry monogamously.

There is no clear precedence regarding "who (husband or wife) should approach first at night?" Some women do not hesitate to approach their husbands. Others think this is too forward and let their husbands come to them (Levine 1988) as is the case of Dolma.²³ My female respondents expressed paradoxical claims. Some claimed initiating contacts, others maintained that they waited for their husbands to approach first. This ambivalence, however, provides Nyinba women a choice and space for negotiation, but sometimes also complication (such as the case of Dolma illustrates, see case two).

Extra-Marital Sexuality and Women's Agency

Extra-marital sexual relations are observed among different cultural groups. Among the Sherpa, an ethnic Tibetan group in Nepal which had polyandry before, a boy was "free to enter into casual sex relations" with any unmarried girl within the limits of clan exogamy (Furer-Haimendorf 1964). Among the Naik, polyandrous Khasa of Kumaon in India, extra-marital sexual relations were so much that it had threatened the very durability of the family unit (Majumdar 1962). Aziz (1978) presents another interesting case of flexible and multiple sexual relations among the people of the upper Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal, adjacent to Tibet. Parmar's (1975) description gives still another account of "loose sex relations" in the polyandrous society of Himanchal Pradesh, India. A "fairly free sexual life" was also observed among the Bhotia of Sikkim (Nakane 1966). "Sexual laxity and sexual experimentation of the wife" was reported among the polyandrous Sinhalese

of Sri Lanka also (Tambiah 1966). Nyinba society is not an exception. Yet, marital and extra-marital sexual relations in Nyinba society are highly conditioned or institutional in the sense that it follows the rules of endogamy-exogamy effectively. I would demonstrate that multiple venues for sexuality offer a space for Nyinba women to exercise their agency, subjectivity and power. It is through this space that they are able to negotiate within the household. What follows is a description on the practice of extra-marital sexuality among the Nyinba. For the sake of convenience, let me categorize them into four main types:

Chaya: The term *chaya* literally means "singing and dancing." Nyinba boys and girls (and sometimes even men and women) establish casual affairs under the *chaya* system which avails them after-work entertainment and sexual socialization. During September-October, all Nyinba arrive in the village, bringing down yak and sheep from the high altitude pastures of the Tibetan frontier. This is a time of harvesting buckwheat, one of the principal staple crops in the area. This is also a time of getting together, sharing happiness and exchanging best wishes to each other.

Nyinba boys and girls agree in advance to get together at a fixed time at night. As a token of their commitments they exchange items of interest, a custom called *kau*. As an expected norm of *kau*, the boy tries to stretch a girl's scarf. If she is positive, she does not mind the boy taking it. Alternatively, she could also offer some other items she has at the moment. In exchange, the boy gives a handkerchief, torch, or sometimes even a watch. He tries to make the value of items exchanged more or less equivalent. The exchange items, however, are not considered for their economic value but for symbol that they reflect for love and affection. The moment of *kau* is already an opportune time for them to initiate their liaison. Once an exchange of items is over, it "removes hesitation" between them. During the *kau*, they are not only in a close proximity, but also in a lonely place. Hence, they do not hesitate to "join cheeks," a phrase used by Nyinba to refer to foreplay. Thus, while *kau* is an occasion to express a preliminary consent for *chaya*, it is also the right occasion for the girl to deny the request right from the beginning and say "no." There is no argument if she refuses it.

Actually, *chaya* is performed the next evening. The boys come out at night with their male companions. To inform the girls of their arrival they whistle a long and use torch-lights on the way. If the girls are ready to depart at the moment, they will reply in a screaming voice, "*O s s rangi*." Then both

sides advance to the customarily fixed place of *chaya*. It begins with singing and dancing in the group. The boys and girls pass the whole night being joyful and cheerful, talking, and laughing. Before dawn, they bring matters to a climax and get parted in pairs and may involve in sexual relations if they wish.²⁴

For the next morning, quite interestingly, all the boys and girls manage to come out of their own beds as if they had slept the whole night as usual. Getting up from one's own bed in the morning is a prerequisite that every Nyinba parent wants to be adhered to by their sons and/or daughters. Otherwise, parents might have to inquire where these boys/girls had been during the night. So there is a clear subterfuge on the part of parents on matters of *chaya*. One possible explanation for this subterfuge may be that Nyinba parents perceive *chaya* as a form of sexual socialization of their children and as part of Nyinba "youth culture." This is a time when boys and girls choose their prospective life-partners also. High rates of love marriage (and even elopement and *jari* marriages) attest to this observation.

Khamdu-doya: Of the several boys and girls participating in *chaya*, some may fall in deep affection to proceed for *khamdu-doya* relations, which literally means, "meet the friends." Under *khamdu-doya*, boys or men usually go to girl's (or women's) beds secretly at night (see case three). Their beds are mostly in the fixed room of the house.²⁵ Those are the parts of a Nyinba house where even a stranger can reach there without any obstruction.

Case Three

Chhopal, now 28 years, has been married polyandrously. Before this he was one of the active boys of Nyinba Gaon for *khamdu-doya*. He even used to go to other Nyinba villages for *khamdu-doya* liaisons. During 1987, he had an affair with Pemayangjen, an 18 years old girl from a neighboring Nyinba village. She used to sleep in *chyang-ma*, an outward room in the second floor, the easiest most part of the Nyinba house for a stranger to visit. And Chhopal used to meet at her bed almost every night. After some time, Pemayangjen's two co-fathers came to know it. They tolerated it for some time. But since, the social and economic standings of Chhopal's household were below than average Nyinba level and far below than their own, they decided not to let the affair continue any more. One night both of them began to watch whether Chhopal was to come. As usual, Chhopal arrived during that night also. The moment he was to enter into the room where

Pemayangjen was sleeping, both of them captured him suddenly and beat severely in the dark. In the morning they came to see him and apologized pretending that they did not identify him during the night. They also expressed concerns over injuries in his body. Since Chhopal was not in a position to move, they kept him for a couple of days. Meanwhile, they told Chhopal that they did not have any objection if he was really willing to marry Pemayangjen. Otherwise they would not tolerate it. Chhopal, however, returned to his home without any reply and never dared to revisit Pemayangjen again.

If he finds her fast asleep, he softly strikes on her nose to wakening her. Once awakened, the girl is not afraid to see him at her bed at that time. It does not make any difference to her, provided they have mutual affection. She receives him with great care and inquires about whether he faced any obstruction to see her. After an exchange of formality like this, they enjoy with titillation, romantic conversations and "joining their cheeks." If both of them wish to have sex, first they decide the place. Finally, the boy leaves the girl on her usual bed and returns back to his home. Process like this continues for years, so long as they enjoy it.

Syarba-syarmu: A third and still an advanced level of liaison, especially between married men and women, is called *syarba-syarmu*; a kind of extra relationship outside formal marriage. The terms *syarba* and *syarmu* denote male and female partners, respectively. Usually but not necessarily, *syarba-syarmu* liaisons are established among married persons whose pre-marital affection was unsuccessful due to social taboos or other causes. It is a kind of permanent and established "adultery" that operates almost parallel to marital unions (see case four).

Initially, a *saitire* ("matchmaker") helps initiate a *syarba-syarmu* affair. The *saitire* may be the same person who had contributed unsuccessfully to make their match at the time of formal marriage also. Involvement of the *saitire* indicates how institutionalized the *syarba-syarmu* liaisons are. At the beginning, the *syarba* sends confidentially some gifts as a proposal. To reciprocate it, she invites the *syarba* for a dinner in a suitable time. Again the *saitire* is the messenger there. On such an occasion, she usually offers *thutt*.²⁶ If she is rich and skillful, she will also feel delighted in offering old liquor, pickles of meat and *jagdul* (a kind of cake roasted in butter). These foods are also shared with the *saitire* as an acknowledgement of his/her contribution to

forming the liaison. After that, the *saitire* has to leave. He/she either returns to home or sleeps somewhere in the same house. Both the *syarba* and *syarmu* then come in close proximity for merrymaking and sexual intimacy. With this, they establish a kind of durable sexual relation without destroying their marital unions on either side.

Case Four

Nagder, now 70 years, has an affair with Pangjum, now 55, since the time they were unmarried. When Pangjum's father became heirless (a state of not having even a single son), Chhiringdorje was brought as resident son-in-law. Chhiringdorje knew it later that Pangjum has a long established liaison with Nagder, a man in the same village. In 1994 an incident happened to them. One day Chhiringdorje went out towards Chunwa Khola (a local river) to look after yaks left there for grazing. Taking the advantage of his absence Pangjum invited Nagder immediately. Nagder came with *jand-chindo*, very old therefore tasty liquor, as an informal ritual. The moment both of them were enjoying, Chhiringdorje appeared there all of a sudden. Chhiringdorje was in fact in a search of a proof to protest against wife for her indulgement in adultery. That night he had returned to his home deliberately after watching from outside whether Nagder was to come. Upon his arrival, naturally both Nagder and Pangjum became shocked. He scolded them badly and challenged Nagder that he would have taken its revenge had his daughter-in-law still alive. Nagder too replied that his liaison with Pangjum had been very old, more than at least Chhiringdorje joined the house as resident son-in-law. Chhiringdorje had nothing to reply. He had two options: either he could dare to break the marriage immediately and return back to his own village or to send Pangjum with Nagder. Both had a heavy cost for him, since he might loose the authority over the estate and other property Chhyangbuti had. Nagder and Pangjum are continuing their *syarba-syarmu* liaison even today, while Chhiringdorje has become just a patient onlooker.

It is not always (possible) that they meet at home. A young *syarba* from a distant village might have to go on a horse to see his *syarmu*, or bring her somewhere in a lonely place (usually at night). Upon completion of their business, the *syarba* might escort her back to home and come back. (As an expected Nyinba practice, he comes out from his bed in the morning as usual.) By Nyinba standard, a normal and expected age of *syarba-syarmu*

liaisons is 30 to 50 years. However, the *syarba-syarmu* liaisons like this may continue for years even during their old age (probably even during their sexually passive days). There are even cases of an old *syarba* going, on a regular interval, to see his *syarmu* in the next village.

One may ask what about the spouse of the person involved in *syarba-syarmu* affair. Does not he or she mind? Of course, the person minds it as the case of Chhiringdorje exemplifies it very clearly (see case four). But the issue is that he himself (or she herself) might have similar affair with other woman (or men). If this is the case the person may lose moral ground to come in protest against spouse's liaison with other person. The best way for him or her is to ignore it and turn a blind eye. There are very rare cases that a husband overtly protests against such affairs or vice versa. No doubt, one can protest, but cannot stop his wife (or her husband) if the person is really committed to continue the affair. I have a number of cases collected from Nyinba Gaon, which enable me to roughly estimate that the magnitude of *syarba-syarmu* liaisons is almost half of the formal marital unions.

Casual Occasions: Nyinba boys and girls have many other occasions on which they can entertain with new friendships and casual sexual relations. By Nyinba perspective, these "casual practices" do not follow any sexual norms. Sometimes they do not take into account even incest. Therefore, such liaisons are considered "deviant" or "non-conformist." *Chhwa-jyagna*, held in the Raling monastery (somewhere on full-moon nights in May) is one such occasion. It is one of the most important Buddhist festivals of the area. It is also a kind of public display of Nyinba prosperity and sexuality to their monogamous Hindu neighbours. Boys and girls, "unmarried surplus women," and married men and women alike take part in *chhwa-jyagna*. *Syon-thicha*, popularly called *bhotey nach*, followed by *deuda nach* are some of the popular dances performed. During the dance, teasing, snatching and scuffling are not considered as "sexual harassment." Even unfamiliar persons are unhesitant in such occasion. Dance and associated physical intimacy are sort of pre-sex activities for the persons involved. It removes hesitation and builds up confidence. This is a group session during which willing boys, girls and married/unmarried persons may select their favourite partners for the night. Those who succeed with can leave the dancing crowd at any moment for *nyaula-charu-doya* (sexual indulgement). Pairs of girls and boys, men and women leave the dance gradually in-between, and go somewhere nearby. The dance continues at night so long as there are still some hesitant aspirants.

The next is the fair of *saune punni* (fullmoon in July-August). By origin, it was a *khasia* (a derivative of Hindu) fair, held at the Simikot Airport in the district headquarters. During the whole day, there is a public display of a variety of Humli dances including the famous *dhami nach* (dance of the village oracles). There is a break of three to four hours in the evening for dinner. Then begins the second and the glamorous part of the fair in which the *khasia* boys and girls converge to participate in the *deuda* dance. From the last decade or more Nyinba boys and girls too are taking part in it enthusiastically, especially in the *deuda* dance. The dance includes teasing, snatching and scuffling (similar as *chhwa-jyagna*, described above). Eventually the boys and girls, who succeed in removing hesitation and getting attached to the favoured ones, leave the dancing crowd, come down beneath the airport where a lot of bushes are. They pass the entire night there.

Some of my key-informants at Simikot, who have observed *saune punni* for the last several years, told me that the fair has increased its charm once Nyinba boys and girls began to participate. They even estimate that about one quarter of the boys and girls who participate in this fair might initiate their liaisons thereafter, either temporarily or permanently. And most interestingly, Nyinba boys and girls have begun to outnumber the *khasia* boys and girls in recent years.

To conclude, because of her virtually central location in the family, *dag-mo* can deploy different forms of sexual practices based on specific situation. Assignment of paternity based on wife's conscience is one of several Nyinba practices that reveal Nyinba women's relative autonomy so far as sexuality is concerned. Freedom of mate selection, possibility of divorce from either side, multiple forms of marital and extra-marital sexuality are some of the issues which reveal that power in polyandry is neither male-centered nor monolithic.

The Nyinba "marital sexuality" clearly reveals how Nyinba women manage their sexual relations with their multiple husbands. Likewise, their "extra-marital sexuality" demonstrates how rich the Nyinba are with respect to their sexuality outside marriage. I argue that Nyinba is an open society regarding sexuality, not because they are Tibetan (as some would tend to argue), but more so because they practice polyandrous marriage. Gender relations in polyandry therefore potentially call for an alternative analysis of power relations between men and women, which is completely different from the ones feminist literature is acquainted with. It also challenges the analytical applicability of the universalizing and homogenising concepts such

as “patriarchy” and the radical feminists’ claims that (hetero)sexuality is oppressive to the women cross-culturally.

Concluding Remarks

Summary and Conclusions

The thematic focus of this paper is power as it is revealed in agency and autonomy and produced, shaped and exercised in polyandrous form of sexuality and the corresponding social organization of property. Polyandry differs from monogamy in the sense that it does not have a single locus of authority in the family. Therefore, polyandry has *horizontal* circuits of power as opposed to *vertical* power networks that exist in monogamy. Despite that the male-head (*dag-pa*) holds the authority in principle; his authority is far less effective due to other socio-economic and agro-ecological dynamics. Thus, in practice, it is female-head (*dag-mo*) who is strong in her agency due to her virtual central location in the household. It means, there are multiple centres of power, and it flows not in a top-down but in a horizontal fashion.

Since there is not a single (male) authority in the polyandrous households, power in polyandry is fluid and multiple. The multiple forms of Nyinba sexuality and its manifestations in aspects of gender relations make gender inequality more flexible and implicit. Resistance and contest in gender relations within the household have as much space in Nyinba society as co-operation and compromise have. On the whole, it appears that Nyinba women are not just subservient “housewives,” they are also active agents in exercising power and agency with their male counterparts.

The practice of resident son-in-law - in which men enter into subordinate status to the women - gives an indication that a tradition of women’s higher position in the household continues. Although property is inherited by the male (usually, the eldest one), ownership is collective rather than individual. Due to the familial ownership of property, it matters little to an individual woman (in that sense to man also) who inherits it. Nyinba women feel secure in polyandry than in monogamy due to two mutually reinforcing reasons. First, in case, one husband dies, another will be there as her partner. So multiple husbands give them a sense of security, thereby it avoids the pity and stigma associated with widowhood (as it has to be faced by their monogamous Nyinba or neighbouring Hindu sisters). Second, polyandry makes the household economically prosperous (due to the nonpartition of the property and pooling of the labour power) (see case one).

For the Nyinba, children are important for two reasons: first, as labourers and second, as heirs. Since children are socially recognized as belonging to the family and not to an individual father, it matters but little who is the *pater* of a particular child. As a consequence, polyandrous women appear to be relatively autonomous so far as their body and sexuality is concerned. A similar argument has also been found in the case of polyandrous women of Chumik village (in Mustang District) (Schuler 1987:67). Menon (1996) argues that sexual restrictions are relaxed in those societies where identification of individual fatherhood does not matter. Furthermore, as the diverse forms of Nyinba sexuality itself reveals, sex is not only a matter of reproduction but also of pleasure. This pleasure aspect of sexuality gives Nyinba women enough space to negotiate at the household level. Considerably higher sexual freedom for both genders in selecting sexual partner(s) or spouse (or conversely, seeking divorce) gives the female as much power and agency as to their male counterparts.

This finding is widely supported by the case of other polyandrous society. Opler (1943, cited in Peters and Hunt 1975), for example, maintains that in polyandry the status of women is well above the norm. Uyl (1995) too has a similar observation in the matrilineal society of the Nayars in India. Levine and Sangree (1980:390) argue that "polyandry is associated with high status for women." They also mention that "Tibetan [polyandrous] women have...been noted to have considerable autonomy and to act with a degree of self-possession" (ibid). Relative to their monogamous sisters in the plain in India, a similar case has also been observed in *Pahari* polyandry (Majumdar 1962).

Theoretical Implications

Women's subordination is a complex issues that cross-cuts the debates over property, sexuality, kinship and gender. Unlike anthropological literature that tends to explore the "genesis of polyandry" instead of its existing dynamics, this paper focuses on the internal, gendered dynamics of polyandry. Challenging the large body of conventional literature that perceived polyandry as an exotic culture (the "Other"), the present paper considers polyandry as a normal cultural practice in its own right. It brings back the mid-twentieth-century feminist debates on sexuality and patriarchy into the feminist agenda for the twenty-first century by substantiating it with new empirical facts from polyandry.

In this context, this research bears a number of theoretical implications. First, despite the practice of plural husbands and that of outside sexual liaisons, absence of sexual jealousy is observed remarkably high. Aiyappan (1935) too has a similar observation in the case of fraternal polyandry in Malabar. The way paternity is assigned at the discretion of the wife provides strong ground to argue that feelings of jealousy are very much a matter of social construction. For the Nyinba, it does not matter so much who the biological father is, given that social fatherhood is a collective and symbolic expression of power configurations at large. Therefore, the sense of jealousy is reduced structurally as well as psychologically. It is structurally reduced in the sense that all co-husbands do not stay at home simultaneously.²⁷ It is psychologically reduced because emotion is constructed and deconstructed within the power dynamics of what I would call the "shared sexuality." I do not claim that jealousy is completely absent in Nyinba gender relations. Following Foucault (1980), I argue that jealousy as human emotion, as sexual emotion is very much a social construct underpinned in the entirety of the cultural milieu (of polyandry in this case).²⁸

Second, in contrast to the gendered power relations in sexuality, Nyinba property system explicitly excludes women and favours men. The gender relations regarding property are, therefore, obviously not egalitarian. Nyinba kinship upholds the discriminatory ideal of the so-called "flesh vs. bone" dichotomy that overtly undervalues women and feminism. Furthermore, the field observation reveals that the tendency of an excessive dependence of Nyinba economy on trade and transhumance and less on agriculture has produced a kind of material and symbolic gaps within society. One of its manifestations is that men occupy trade and transhumance that are "mobile and external," and women are confined to agricultural tasks that are "static and local". The gender division of labour that exists among them very much attests to this distinction.

Nonetheless, Nyinba women are not marginalized to the extent of their monogamous counterparts. In polyandry, practically it does not matter so much regarding who owns property and who inherits it, to the extent it matters to monogamous women and men. This finding is closer to Engels's (1972) assertion that the status of women in society depends on the nature of the social organization of production (and organization of property). To reiterate again, since property inheritance is patrilineal, yet owned and used collectively, polyandrous Nyinba women do not suffer from a sense of economic dependence to the extent their monogamous sisters do.

Third, this research does not support the excessive economic interpretation of Prince Peter (1965:192) when he says, "anything and everything is possible in...[Tibetan polyandry] in matters of marital arrangements, provided that it is suitable economically." This grossly generalized observation does not pay attention to the issues of fraternal solidarity - the ultimate ideological aim of Tibetan polyandry - which fulfills the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of the polyandrous society. As this paper shows, polyandrous sexuality is not promiscuous as Prince Peter fabricates it. Norms of incest and exogamy exist not only in marital but also and more importantly in their extra-marital sexuality,²⁹ a point that Prince Peter has missed out.

Fourth, there appear a number of similarities between polyandry and matriliney, despite that descent systems stemming from opposite lines. Take the case of the Nayars, for instance (see Uyl, 1995). Both among the Nyinba and the Nayars, the position of women is more or less equal to men. The position of widow too is not much wretched as in monogamous (Hindu) society. It is important to note that in either case, *both children and property belong not to an individual father, but to the family (or the group of fathers)*. The practice of resident son-in-law exists in both societies. Despite multiple husbands and fluid sexual relations, sexual jealousy is remarkably low. The biological value of reproduction is low too, because in both societies sex accounts for pleasure also. So, there exists a relative autonomy for women with regard to their sexuality. Hence, this study offers strong empirical support to the long held anthropological argument that polyandry is a remnant of a matrilineal past³⁰ (see Kapadia 1955, Majumdar 1974). I agree with Lewis when he says, "polyandry...seems...better suited to matrilineal than to patrilineal conditions" (Lewis 1985:262).

Finally, this study brings back the debates on matriliney and sexuality, and broadens our understanding of the gendered power relations in the family. It contributes to the gap of knowledge that exists so far as understanding the roots of women's subordination is concerned. It reveals that women's subordination has not only an economic base as the liberal and the socialist feminists claim, but it also has a sexual and power base, a point they ignore. Following Foucault, this study too affirms that sexuality is a social construction that produces power and is manifested in gender relations shaped by agency and autonomy of women and men.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Drs. Lily H. M. Ling, Saskia Wieringa (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague), Dr. Marion den Uyl (The Free University of Amsterdam), Dr. Nancy E. Levine (University of California, Los Angeles), Profs. Dilli R. Dahal, Prem K. Khatri (Center for Nepal and Asian Studies), Dr. Ram B. Chhetri (Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University), and the friendly people of Nyinba Gaon. Their support, critical comments and additional information have been vital in different stages of this study. The interpretations, errors and imperfections are, however, that of mine.

Notes

1. Most of the literature on polyandry including this paper deals with fraternal polyandry. See Unni (1958) for the non-fraternal polyandry (practised in southern Malabar of South India).
2. Most of these analyses suffer from several biases. First, there has been an androcentric bias in the study of polyandry (Berreman 1975, 1980). They put male at the center of their analyses and ignore the centrality of female. Women often disappear from their analyses. Second, there has also been a romantic bias in the sense that polyandry is figured out as an exotic and a fascinating culture trait (Berreman 1980, Levine 1988:xiv).
3. Berreman's reflective criticism reminds me this point, when he writes, "we have tended to regard monogamy as expectable (even moral), polygyny as reasonable (even enviable) and polyandry as puzzling (even disturbing)" (Berreman 1980:387).
4. By the phrase "gender regime of power," I refer to the social inequality between women and men, and the associated institutional practices including access to and control over resources, gender roles, and issue of control over one's own body.
5. Originally, postmodernism is represented in the works of Derrida (1973), followed by Lacan (1977), Kristeva (1982) and developed by Foucault (1980).
6. Of 19 polyandrous women I interviewed, 10 reported that they were married with the elder and the other 9 with younger male among the co-husbands.
7. The present study is based on one of these hamlets, in this paper pseudo-named as "Nyinba Gaon." There were a total of 379 men and women during 1997. The average household size in Nyinba Gaon was considerably larger (7.4 members per household) than the national average of Nepal (5.6 members in 1991). The average sex ratio was in favour of males (107 men per hundred women). Interestingly, the sex ratio of polyandrous households was much higher (149 men per hundred women) than nonpolyandrous ones (which was 81) (Luitel 1998).

8. In case father's brothers are too many, a suffix is added to avoid the confusion, thus *ganda* (the eldest), *parwa* (next in the order of age), *jyonda* (third one) and *chima* (the youngest), etc.
9. One possible explanation for using a separate term to mother's brother might be that under cross-cousin marriage, the ego becomes closer as affinal kin. It is one example that shows the functional utility of kinship in regulating Nyinba sexuality and constructing gender identity.
10. Such a custom has also been reported in the case of *Pahari* polyandry (Berreman 1962).
11. For example, there are some cases where the elder brother would not formally marry with the girl he loves. Rather he would wait a couple of years so that the younger brother is sufficiently grown up to select particular girl he likes to marry. The elder brother(s) will join up her after the marriage.
12. The economic gaps between the Nyinba and their Hindu neighbours were clearly revealed in 1998 famine when more than 300 Humli reportedly died due to a lack of food and the spread of cholera. Almost all of the victims were from the Hindu villages and none of them were from any Tibetan settlement.
13. In Tibetan society in general and Tibetan polyandry in particular, the existence of *trongbat* appears at the core of property inheritance. *Trongbat* is a group of households sharing a common lineage. *Trongbat* holds an ultimate right of inheritance of the household estates. A household without any child (to serve as heir), for example, transfers its estates to the household most closely related to in the *trongbat* alliance, and these two households thereupon merge (Levine 1988:29-30). This happens when one of the families fails to produce "even a daughter" who could marry uxorilocally to continue the household (Levine 1988:187).
14. Polygynous polyandry is a marital situation when many co-husbands share many wives at a time, which often takes place due to not having a son by the first wife. (I came across one case in which one man brought as many as seven wives consecutively to ensure having a son.)
15. I found very few cases where dowry consisted of land also. The location of such land, however, was very marginal, and the size too small. So the land given in dowry was not an independent cultivating unit.
16. Of these seven women, four were groom's mother's brother's daughters while the remaining three were father's sister's daughters.
17. *Dyakcha* (marriage by capture) is practiced when a girl is not willing to marry with the boy. In such a case, the boy accompanied by his friends captures her "forcefully" and brings back to his home. After a couple of days it is ritually formalized with a payment of some nominal penalty to the family of the girl. *Syuna* is an informal and short celebration of marriage once groom is brought in with her voluntary consent.
18. Practice of bride price as reported by Majumdar (1955) in India has not been found among Nyinba.
19. In Tibet, a widower used to remarry with another woman to whom his son (from the diseased wife) too could be sexually accommodated.

20. Out of 73, two households consisted of unmarried children with widow female-heads.
21. "Sharing mouth," means sharing the same dishes. Once boys and girls "share" the same wooden bowl, called *furu*, while drinking liquor, they are not supposed to be sexual partners any time in their life-time. The social ideology is either share sex or mouth, not both.
22. It was perhaps one of social taboos the Nyinba developed to maintain sexual privacy. It could ease wife's discomfort at approaching one of several co-husbands.
23. In this strategy, the problem is more than one husband may approach at a time. Therefore, usually husbands expect that it is wife who should approach first, or give hints to particular husband beforehand.
24. All these activities are not beyond the knowledge of the parents. The boys' whistling, girls' response in high-pitch voice, and singing songs are open activities. Nonetheless, the parents do not bother to peep on. There might be two reasons. First, it is one of the accepted Nyinba practices, which, I would say, is a part of their youth culture. Second, the parents themselves might have done the same during their youth, thus losing any moral ground in prohibiting their sons and daughters.
25. The girls' usual place of sleeping is either veranda, called *khamdan* or *chyang-ma* room at the second floor. Alternatively, they can also sleep at the corridor (called *fikur*) or *lohang* (outer) at the first floor.
26. The *thutt* is a kind of sweet-cake made up of flour, sugar and yak butter. One piece of *thutt* usually weighs one kg. Offering *thutt* as one of the items in dinner is a symbolic consent on behalf of the woman.
27. For instance, during the entire period of my stay in Nyinba Gaon in 1997, I could find just two households where two co-husbands were simultaneously at home.
28. I saw a man bringing a step-father for his widow mother. I also found couple of cases where elder brothers were waiting for their junior brothers to grow up and choose a common wife for all. Both of these phenomena, I argue, are highly and emotionally unimaginable for the monogamous Hindu society in the immediate neighbourhood of the Nyinba.
29. Nyinba consider casual sexual liaisons in fairs such as these as "deviant" due to their normlessness as it is experienced in Raling festival or *saune punni*, for instance.
30. An empirical remnant of matrilineal society was found in Tibet during 1960s (Prince Peter 1965). As in Tibet, Nyinba too practise both uxorilocal (husband moving to wife's location) and virilocal (wife moving to husband's location) marriages (see Levine 1988, Luintel 1998, Schuler 1987). I found three cases of uxorilocal marriage in Nyinba Gaon. There were also a couple of cases of unmarried women begetting children. (Such children are called *nhelu* and have to face stigma throughout their life.) When a Nyinba couple becomes "heirless" (that means, when there is no son), one of the popular options to continue the *trongbat* is to bring a resident son-in-law. Prince Peter (1965) argues that it is a typical cultural trait found among the matrilineal society. Nancy E. Levine says

that among some nomads of the east Tibet (near the Lake Quighai and also among the Golok groups), some women did not marry, but had children (information based on e-mail communication, November 2000). For Stein (1972) such cultural zones were the "Kingdoms of Women" where some sort of matrilineal system prevailed.

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Appendix 1

Nyinba Kinship Terminology*

Primaries

Husband	: Khimjang
Wife	: Pangma
Mother	: Aa(n)
Son	: Puja
Daughter	: Pu(n)
Brothers	
Elder	: Aaju
Younger	: Nho
Sisters	
Elder	: Aaji
Younger	: Nhu

Lineal Ascendants

Father's father	: Mhi
Mother's father	: Mhi
Father's mother	: Aabi
Mother's mother	: Aabi
Great-grandfather	: Mhi
Great-grandmother	: Aabi
Great-great-grandfather	: Mhi
Great-great-grandmother	: Aabi

Lineal Descendants

Grand son	: Chhou
Great-grand son	: Chhou
Great-great-grand son	: Chhou
Grand daughter	: Chhau(n)
Great-grand daughter	: Chhau(n)
Great-great-grand daughter	: Chhau(n)

* Source: Luintel (1998), op. cit.

Collaterals

Father's brother	: Aaya
Father's sister	: Aani
Mother's brother	: Aajang
Mother's sister	: Aa(n)
Father's brother's son	
Senior than the ego	: Aaju
Junior than the ego	: Nho
Father's brother's daughter	
Senior than the ego	: Aaji
Junior than the ego	: Nhu
Mother's brother's son	: Aajang Chyo(n)
Mother's brother's daughter	: Tuchima
Brother's son	
Of male ego	: Puja
Of female ego	: Chhou
Brother's daughter	
Of male ego	: Pu(n)
Of female ego	: Chhau(n)
Sister's son	
Of male ego	: Chhou
Of female ego	: Puja
Sister's daughter	
Of male ego	: Chhau(n)
Of female ego	: Pu(n)

Affines

Husband's father	: Kyobu
Husband's mother	: Ghyugmu
Wife's father	: Kyobu
Wife's mother	: Ghyugmu
Son's wife	: Chhau(n)
Daughter's husband	: Magpa
Husband's brother	
For mother's brother's son	: Chhou
For father's sister's son	: Aajang
Husband's brother's wife	: ?
Husband's sister	

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For elder than ego	: Tu (n)
For younger than ego	: Chhau(n)
Husband's sister's husband	: ?
Wife's brother	
Father's sister's son	: Chhou
Mother's brother's son: Aajang Chyo(n)	
Wife's brother's wife	: ?
Wife's sister	
Father's sister's daughter	: Chhau(n)
Mother's brother's daughter	: Tuchima

A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LOSS OF PUBLIC PROPERTIES IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF POKHARA, NEPAL

Jagannath Adhikari

Introduction

In this paper, the historical, religious and cultural aspects that led to the development of public properties (mainly *chautārās* – platform with huge shade providing trees - and community orchards, open spaces and water ponds) in Pokhara, Nepal, are discussed in detail in relation to their ecological functions. The processes (urbanization and modernization separating nature and culture) that led to the decline of these properties are then examined.

It is argued in this paper that while urbanization may be a necessity and important, the concept of separating urban people and culture from nature led to the decline of trees and other important properties which are equally important for the life of a city.

Pokhara, a tourist town in central Nepal, has undergone a rapid change in the last five decades. The urbanization process of the last five decades has brought many changes in social and ecological features of the town. One of the main features of the town was the existence, in plenty, of the public properties, mainly open space, *chautārās* (huge shade providing trees and a platform where people can sit, rest and meet) and community orchards, and water ponds. These features were man-made, and, were maintained, as is argued in this paper, as they had many cultural, ecological and economic functions at a time when the mode of production was largely agriculture and livestock. Trees, particularly those used in *chautārās*, and ponds were also important from religious points of views.

As the process of urbanization continued, Pokhara became more and more exposed to modernization. The developmentist attitude of the

government established after the downfall of autocratic Rana rule in 1950 gave priority to physical development even at the cost of nature. Pokhara, which is now (in 2001) a home to about 156,000 people, started attracting people who worked in foreign countries. Their resettlement and investment in the town is also responsible for its rapid pace of urbanization (see Adhikari and Seddon 2002). This town is the fastest growing town in the country. Population in the town has been growing by more than 8 % per year in the last four decades. Tourism income and remittances are the main sources of income. Agricultural production, which was the main source of income until the 1970s, now contributes less than one fourth to the total income of its population. Clearly, it is not a main source of income for a large majority of households in Pokhara.

Changes in the economy and the shift in the attitude of people led to not only the lack of interest in planting trees and in maintaining open spaces and water ponds, but also to the destruction of these properties. These properties, particularly the trees, were seen as obstacles for the progress of the town. An attitude that a place covered by trees does not represent modern place started to occupy the mind of the people as Pokhara started to urbanize. Influence of the modern buildings and urban life and the concept of modernization and development created a notion that urban areas are modern and rural areas are backward. Urban areas, people and their cultures were thought as *shabya* (or civilized), and village areas, people and their folk culture were thought as *ashabya* or *pākhe* (uncivilized) or *gaule* (folk). In extreme case, the village people were also called *jangali* (people of forest), which means wild, uncivilized and without culture. Existence of a large number of trees and forest/tree grooves was considered to be associated with village life.

The above change in the concept of people is also generally found to impact upon the economy of Nepal as a whole. Professions dependent on land and forest like agriculture are now regarded as backward, and to be done by people who are illiterate and ignorant. Trade and job (service) are now celebrated professions. But until 3-4 decades ago people regarded agriculture as the best profession. Even the Sanskrit scriptures are said to profess farming as a best occupation, followed by trade and service. Farming was considered as a 'pure' occupation in that it does not involve cheating and lying as in other professions. But now with changes in the economy and influence of modern value, people have been distinctively isolated from land and forest. The dominant development thinking separated people and nature as different things. It is also partly because of this thinking that the leaders of

the Pokhara and even the urban planners in early 1950s to 1960s did not pay attentions to the existing trees, and cultural features. These were thought necessary only in the villages, and for the *pākhē* (uncivilized people). But again since the 1980s, the necessity of trees in urban settings has also been considered important. This has again come as a fashion, and due to the influence of 'green' in attracting tourists. The city planners in the 1990s even stated that they would make the city as a 'green city'. While it is important that trees are now considered essential even in urban setting, but the dominant thinking is that they are separate from human culture.

Public Properties and their Importance

Public properties are the natural and manmade resources, assets or other things whose ownership is not private. Therefore, it is mainly the mode of ownership that distinguishes 'public' properties as against 'private' properties. Here public properties also mean those properties whose use right is not limited to an individual or household but determined, in some cases, by the community. Accordingly, air, water, river, lake and water bodies, forests, and other natural and cultural resources like public pasture, building, temples and *pāti* and *pauwās* (home and shelters for public use and for homeless), *chautārās*, trees, water taps, well, and the like are the public properties. But in this article, *chautārās* and community orchards, open space (public ground and others) and water ponds are studied in detail.

Public properties are necessary for the security, health and sustainable development of a society. In an urban setting, public properties play an even greater role, and are more important. A large majority of urban population do not have their own house, land and other natural things like trees. In this context, open spaces, buildings and shelters, temples, *pāti* and *pauwās*, trees and park are important for their recreational, emergency and other uses.

The general perception now is that 'public properties' are important only in rural settings and there are a large number of studies about this in Nepal. But there are almost negligible number of studies about 'public properties' and the changes in their use and existence in an urban setting. As public resources like forests, pasture, water and the like play an important role in the livelihoods of rural people, there is a large body of studies devoted to status, ownership and management of these resources. But this is just the reverse in the context of an urban environment. There are a few studies about the changes in the status and role of public properties like temple, *pāti*, *pauwa*

(homes and shelters for the homeless and for public use) and *guthi* (land devoted to temples and religious purpose) in Kathmandu. But even here there is little attention on trees, and public open space.

The lack of studies on public properties in urban areas is also a product of a mindset which considers these properties less useful in an urban environment. On the other hand, in rural areas these properties are generally called 'common property resources' which are thought to be essential for the livelihoods or enterprises of rural areas like agriculture, livestock, agro-forestry, fishery and the like. As the profession of the urban population is generally not 'primary production', it could be one of the reasons for giving less emphasis in the study of public properties in urban areas. But these properties are also equally important in urban context.

In urban areas, public properties, particularly the large open spaces, are important and essential from security point of view. To lessen the adverse impact of earth-quakes, floods and manmade disasters like fire, it is essential to have open spaces. Especially in the event of an earthquake, it is important to bring the people to an open space, because it is not the earthquake as such that kills many people, but the after affects of the earthquake (like fire, floods and the like) that kill more people. To reduce the impact of these after affects, it is essential to have open spaces. It is said that the earthquake that devastated Kathmandu and killed about 34,000 people in 1934 would have killed many times more people if there had been no Tundikhel (large open space in the middle of the town). Pokhara and the surrounding areas are prone to earthquake as they lie in the fault line created by the immersion of Indian Plate under the Tibetan Plate. As the process of immersion of the Plate is continuing, earthquakes are frequent in this region. Apart from this benefit, open spaces are also essential for sports, recreations and other physical exercises of the urban people. Temples, *patis* and *pauwas* are also important from the cultural, social and environmental point of view. Poor residents of the city who cannot afford to have their own open space, trees, and temples, need to be dependent on these public properties. Accordingly, public properties are also essential for the proper physical growth and health of the children of the low income people. Public properties are, thus, even more important to the low income families than the wealthier ones.

Migration of poorer households from rural areas to the urban areas is a worldwide phenomenon and it is growing rapidly. The urban population is thus exploding. Even in Nepal, about 16 % of her population now live in urban areas. Now, poverty is no longer a rural problem alone; it has also

become an urban problem. Availability of 'public properties' in urban areas has been providing some respite for the poor people. In some cases 'public properties' have also been helpful in securing a part of livelihoods of the poor people. Considering this fact the new concepts of poverty reduction through 'urban agriculture' and 'urban livestock raising' have been promoted. In most Indian cities urban 'dairy production' has given employment and income for many poorer households. Because of the growing environmental consciousness in urban areas, 'urban forestry' has been popularized. In Pokhara, 'urban forestry' has now come as a dilemma. Previously, the urban planners and leaders destroyed the trees, and now they suggest that 'greening' is necessary, for which they are using more and more alien trees, whose ecological and economic functions to the community are not known.

Several studies/researches have been conducted about Pokhara. Most of them describe the natural beauty and its interesting geological and geographical features. This tendency is seen especially in the studies conducted in the past¹. Even though there are large numbers of researches conducted in Pokhara, there is no concern to study the 'public properties'. In the books written about Nepal by foreigners, there are few references to Pokhara, but they are not related to its natural resources, public properties and their uses. Some of them have explained the commercial possibilities in the town. William Krickpatrick (1973) has mentioned that he had crossed the bridge on Seti river and been up to Beni in Magydi. Hemilton (1971) had traveled in Pokhara in 1819 and he had mentioned 'Pokhara is a place frequented by businesspersons from all over the country'. Similarly, Perceival Landon (1987) has also written some comments about Pokhara. In 1899, a Japanese Monk, Ekai Kawaguchi (1909) visited Pokhara while he was traveling to Tibet. He had described the town as the most beautiful place on the earth, but considered its size like a bigger village in Japan. Tucci (1987) while traveling in Pokhara in 1950 had forecasted that Pokhara will become a commercial center.

Among the studies of Pokhara, Harka Gurung's study (1965) is considered as a foundation. But his study is also focused on geological and social aspects of the town. The study has covered the land-use patterns and urban development, but there is little discussion on manmade and traditionally developed land-uses like *chautārās* and water ponds. He has mentioned about the *chautārās*, but has not given detailed numbers and their functions. After the 1970s, several studies were conducted about Pokhara (Meirow 2000; Murphi 1965; Raj 2000; Thapa 1990). Blaikie and his friends

(1980) argued that Pokhara's urbanization was the result of government policies and the expanding bureaucracy. Studies conducted then after are concerned with commerce, trade, industry, tourism, settlement pattern and migration, land-use changes and the like (Blaike et al 1980; Gurung et al 2000; Bansnet et al 1992; Gurung 2002; Gurung 1979; Gyawali 1997; Adhikari 2000; KC et al 1992; Pandit 1989; Parajuli 1999 and 2000; Shrestha 2000). These studies have mentioned that public properties in Pokhara have declined. Even in media this has been raised as an issue. Still then there is no proper study as to why these public properties were maintained and why they have now been disappearing. Shroeder (1978) in a study of a village located just outside the then Pokhara town had mentioned that a large public open space used as community pasture and recreational ground had been shrinking because of mainly encroachment from individuals.²

Even though it was clear that public properties in Pokhara like open spaces, *chautārās*, water ponds and the like have been lost along with the process of urbanization, there were no studies either on the adverse impact of this loss or for its documentation. In this context, a study was conducted in Pokhara in 2000 to study the loss of public property, the reasons for their development and existence and the adverse impact of this loss on the society and ecology. While conducting this research, an inventory on public properties of Pokhara developed on the basis of a survey conducted in 1977 was also found. This proved useful in making a comparison. In addition, oral history records were also developed from elderly people regarding the social and ecological changes in Pokhara. Various reports published in newspapers were also consulted to understand and reconstruct the historical reality leading to the development of various public properties³.

Development of public properties and their loss in the context of socio-cultural changes and urbanization

The frequently asked question about Pokhara is 'why so many open grounds (spaces) suitable for pasture existed in Pokhara and that too as public property?'. Why trees were not developed in these grounds? Was it a natural feature or a manmade feature? Studies conducted about Pokhara do not take up these questions, even though similar questions seem to have been raised in the context of India and Pakistan (Zimmerman 1987 and Dove 1998) in rural context. Similarly there are other questions related to other manmade features in Pokhara. Why *chautārās* were so numerous in Pokhara? Why were they

developed at a time when forests were converted into pasture lands? Why people kept so many water ponds? Answers to these questions require some insight from the historical development of this place.

The prehistory writings (see Shrestha 2000) about Pokhara valley and its surrounding hills reveal that the valley area was a dense forest with a hot and humid climate. Because of this natural reason, prehistoric people lived only in the surrounding hills. But after the 8th and 9th centuries, people of Tibeto-Burman origin (like Gurungs and Magars) started to settle in the forests of the hills. They practiced the swidden cultivation, the remnants of which are still seen in the hill villages where these people rotate lands located away from the settlement in a 3 or 5 years cycle. Their main occupation was animal husbandry. Various ethnographic studies and the historical writing in the past 250-300 years reveal that their economy was totally based on animal husbandry.

The valley bottom area was inhospitable because of hot climate and malaria. Therefore, only in winter people would come to the valley with the main purpose of raising animals. This would also save the fodder collected at home. This grazing of animals required the conversion of dense forest into grass fields. The yearly grazing would also prevent the conversion of this land into a forest. This is the reason that Pokhara was known as a place with tall grasses in the past. Until the 11th century, there was no settlement in the Pokhara valley. Politically, it was under the jurisdiction of a Ghale Gurung king of the Kaski, a microstate before the unification of Nepal⁴.

In the 13th century, Shah kings, follower of Hindu religion, started a slow entry into the present day Nepal. They had already taken over a kingdom (Syanjya) south of Pokhara by the 14th century. The king Kulmandan Shah conquered the Kaski kingdom also, which included Pokhara valley.

The king Kulmandan had numerous and large herds of cows. He kept his cattle in Pokhara. It is not known to what extent the natural forest of Pokhara was destroyed in the past by the early seasonal herdsmen or by the newcomer Hindu king for the grazing of his cattle. But it is certain that before these human interventions, Pokhara was full of forest. The natural regeneration of vegetation is quite high in this area. Prevention of human and domestic animal interference can easily lead to regeneration of trees and development of forest in a due course of time. Therefore, large grazing lands were developed purposively to maintain the extensive animal husbandry. But still then, Pokhara was not settled by the people because of the malaria. At the most people would come here during the day, but would return to the hill

tops for the night. Later on, the hills were also increasingly settled by the Hindus who migrated eastward from Jumla, their center of entry to Nepal from India. Shrestha (2000) also writes that because of suitability to grow rice in the plains of valley bottom, people started to cultivate rice there even in summer season. But, invariably, they would return to the hilltops to spend the night. The increased human intervention and the changes in land use in Pokhara had already reduced the severity of malaria.

Later on Pokhara was developed as a winter residential place. When the king Kulmandan constructed a winter place in Batulachaur, more and more people started to settle in Pokhara, especially in winter. The area around the palace started to develop as a permanent settled area. It should also be important to note that this place is located at a considerable height within the Pokhara valley. The problem of malaria and hot climate would have been considerably low here. Under the order of Kulmandan Shah to develop a temple in his new place in Kaskikot⁵, Bindybasini idol was brought from Bindyachal in India. Before, it was taken to Kaskikot, it was placed in a hillock in Pokhara valley for a night stop. But the next morning, people could not lift up the idol, and the king then ordered its people to build the temple there. To look after the temple, Brahmin priests were assigned and they were also given some land as grant. A permanent settlement was also started to develop around the temple. It is just at this time that Pokhara also gained some importance in commerce. The trade route from India to Tibet passed through Pokhara. Similarly another trade route from Jumla in the west to Kathmandu in the east also passed through Pokhara. In winter there used to be a huge crowd of people, which would require development of several seasonal shelters. As the commercial importance of Pokhara began to grow, the last king of Kaski (Siddi Narayan Shah) developed a plan to build a town and houses like in Kathmandu. He brought skilled Newar from Bhaktapur in Kathmandu valley in 1752 for this purpose. But rapid development of the town began from 1769 after Gorkha king Prithivi Narayan Shah unified Nepal in 1769. This unification led to the migration of businesspersons like Newars from Kathmandu to Pokhara in great numbers. After the unification of the country, Pokhara was also considered as a strategic administrative and military outpost. More and more government offices started to appear. But until 1950s, Pokhara was not considered as a good place for living.

It is precisely to make Pokhara a pleasant place for settlement that that led to the development of numerous *chautārās*, which were so useful during summer. In the context of conversion of large forest area into pasture, it

seems that *chautārās* were thought essential for the shade and cooling effect. These *chautārās* were made at a place where people would like to have rest while walking or for shelter during peak heat periods after working in the fields. It must have also been thought that *chautārās* were useful for reducing the impact of malaria. In places where incidence of malaria was high, *chautārās* were numerous. The existence of big trees would also make the locality cool. The practice of making *chautārās* was also common in other places in west central Nepal, but they were not built in such large numbers as in Pokhara. The Hindu religious values that required worshipping of trees that are generally used in *chautārās* might have also led to the development of these *chautārās*. Moreover, the leaves of these trees were also needed in religious ceremonies. The development of water ponds in Pokhara was also to encourage farmers to settle in the valley and to help in raising livestock. These water ponds were useful for storing rainwater, recharging water table, and for irrigation and animals. Community orchards of mango trees were also developed to encourage settlement and for other social, religious and public health functions.

After a historic phase that required the development of *chautārās*, open grounds for grazing and water ponds, Pokhara underwent another phase of development (urbanization) that did not consider these properties as valuable. The changes in the mode of production, the rapid decline in the importance of farming as a source of livelihood, control of malaria since the 1950s with the help of USAID support, possibility of importing foodgrains from distance places due to the development of transportation reduced the importance of these properties. On the other hand, the concept introduced by the state especially after the 1950s about the need for development and modernization created an image to the people that trees and water ponds are the symbols of backwardness and rural life. This also led to the indiscriminate felling of the trees and abandonment of water ponds. Similarly, individualistic ideas and erosion in social and community control also led to the indiscriminate felling of community orchards. Government agencies often felled these trees to earn income which was then used for the development of infrastructures. Even though urbanization and reduction in the importance of these public properties can also be seen from societal evolutionary point of view, but the main contention is that the separation of 'nature' and 'culture' led to the thinking that trees are only natural things and they represent backwardness. And, they were to be placed in rural areas (which were perceived as *ashabya*, *pākhē*, *gaule* or *jangali*). If trees or *chautārās* in Pokhara were also

considered as manmade features developed with some functions, they would not have been destructed in such a manner as discussed in the sections below. They would have been modified in a way that would have been suitable in a changed circumstance. Dove (1998) has also found the adverse impact of such separation of 'nature' and 'culture' concepts, which he argued, led to deforestation in Punjab, Pakistan.

The process of urbanization of Pokhara had started from the 1950s as it is from this time that market started to grow in terms of both physical expansion and the volume of transactions. Since 1953, Pokhara was linked to other towns in Nepal and India by airplane. But it is only in 1957 that first vehicle was run there. In 1959, it was declared as 'municipality', and from then on various development projects, educational institutions and service centers were established. Government also declared it as a headquarters of the 'western development region' in 1973. By that time, it was also linked with an Indian border town (Bhairahawa and Sunauli) by a road built by Indian assistance, and to Kathmandu by a road built with Chinese assistance. Construction of these roads increased the commercial importance of the town. Immigration of people to Pokhara was at its height after the construction of these roads. For sometime, population growth rate remained about 18% per year. But after sometime, this population growth rate had reduced, and stabilized at about 8% per year.

The west central Nepal, of which Pokhara is a center, is also known as a place from where a proportionately large number of people, especially hill ethnic groups like Gurungs and Magars, go to foreign countries to work (Adhikari 1996). The Gurungs and Magars have been working in British and Indian armies for the last 200 years. The income earned by the people working away in foreign lands has also been invested in Pokhara for the purchase of land and building of houses.

In terms of social composition of people, Pokhara had been traditionally a Brahmin-Chettri dominated place. As discussed above, because of the hot climate and danger of malaria, hill ethnic groups had not settled in Pokhara, even though it is probable that they had used it for winter pasturage. But the later migrants like Brahmins and Chettris had probably no access to good land in the hills, and because of the possibility of combining animal husbandry in dry lands and paddy cultivation in wet places, they occupied the valley. But initially, they used to work all day in the valley and return to the hills during night. Conquering of Kaski by Shah king, his establishment of a winter place and an important temple in Pokhara had encouraged Brahmins

and Chettris to settle here despite inhospitable climate and health conditions. But after the 1970s, migration of hill ethnic groups who could improve their economic conditions from higher incomes changed the social composition of Pokhara. Gurungs and Magars now dominate the population of the town (Adhikari and Seddon 2002). In Pokhara, their main profession was to follow the skills they learned while in the army jobs. Most of them did/do not farm. They developed and followed various non-farm jobs. Because of the high economic growth and creation of employment opportunities in construction and service sectors, poorer people also migrated to Pokhara in equal magnitude. The encroachment on public land thus increased.

The development of 'open spaces', and particularly trees, community orchards, water ponds and *chautārās* owes much to the religious practice of Brahmins and Chettris. In the Sanskrit scriptures, trees have special place. In various religious ceremonies of Brahmins and Chettries, various parts of these plants/trees are necessary. Women worship these trees once every week. Marriages between trees were also a common practice. Therefore, Brahmins and Chettris had a special relation to these trees. As their occupation was also farming, these trees and water ponds were also required to them. On the other hand, the new immigrants, mainly Gurungs and Magars, even though were nature-worshippers in their place of origin (villages), had no especial value to the trees and objects developed by the people of other culture. Their several years of service in foreign lands also mean that they had been accustomed to other cultures and were less sensitive to the religious values and rituals with which these trees were planted, maintained and used. It is also interesting that political power in Pokhara slowly shifted to these recent migrants who are also considered *novae riche*. Their new-found wealth power was also instrumental for their ascendancy to political power. This has been described elsewhere by Adhikari (2003) by analyzing the political history of the last 4 decades. As persons with new cultural and religious values became decision-makers, the sensitivity towards these traditionally made features was certainly less.

Pokhara also attracts about a hundred thousand tourists in a year. Tourism is now one of the main sources of income. Even though tourism is vital in the economy, this has also led to various social and ecological changes. The main change is seen in the treatment of nature, which is now seen as a way to increase profit. To attract the tourists, more and more hotels have been made at a location from where view of the Himalayas is clear. A large chunk of open grounds were first privatized and then sold to these hotel

owners. Those objects that would attract tourists started to receive more attention. For the tourists, the *chautārās*, community orchards and small water ponds were not attractive because, firstly, they would come only in winter when the skies are clear and, secondly, they would be able to afford cooling things. Therefore, from the tourism point of view also, there was less urgency to preserve these trees.

It is natural that with increased urbanization and population growth, more houses, roads and other physical infrastructures are necessary. But in the process of the development of these infrastructures, traditionally existing public properties have been destroyed, encroached upon and lost. Until 1974, when the government had started a scientific and modern survey of the land and property, there were plenty of public properties in Pokhara. But in the name of development of roads, government destroyed much of the planted trees and built *chautārās*, community orchards and water ponds. On the other hand, the powerful and wealthy persons captured the 'open spaces' kept and maintained for the public use as the value of land increased significantly. From time to time, legal systems are distorted to facilitate the registration of the public land into private land by the powerful class. The previous political regime (1960-1990) used much of this public land to gain political favors from these powerful people. The landless squatters have also occupied such land. Today, a common Pokhara resident does not find an open space for recreation, sports and for physical exercise. Youths are seen to play in the roads and in a small plots of land reserved for house construction. One or two common playgrounds kept for the colleges and sports complex are not accessible to the common residents of the town.

In the sections below, magnitude of the decline of these public properties and the specific reasons surrounding their preservation in the past and destruction in recent times are discussed.

Chautārās and community orchards: *Chautārās* are also one of the special features of the landscape of Pokhara. Built along the sides of a road or trail and within a short distance from one another, these *chautārās* used to provide different aesthetic value to the landscape. Generally two or three trees were/are planted in *chautārās*; these trees are *pipal* (*Ficus religiosa*), *bar* (*Ficus bangalensis*) and *sami* (*Ficus benjamina*). Generally first two are planted in a *chautārā*. The major use of these *chautārās* is to provide shade to the pedestrians and the people. In the summer, various meetings, gatherings, and celebrations were also organized on the *chautārās*. The trees

planted here are big trees. They produced especial types of fruits which attracted a large number of birds. Similarly, these trees were also home to various orchids. The large leaf size of these trees was also useful to absorb the dust of the road/trails.

Even though the primary aim of the *chautārās* is to provide shade and cooling effects in a hot and humid summer condition, people were motivated to build them from religious point of view. Generally people would build *chautārās* and plant trees there to earn merit in the next birth. But planting trees and building *chautārās* was an especial endeavor of the people who had no children. The Sanskrit scripture has clearly said that planting and developing a tree is equivalent to producing a child. The childless couples would construct a *chautārā*, plant *bar* and *pipal* trees, and then organize a marriage ceremony of these two trees. The marriage ceremony was the same as that was organized for the people. People had the faith that organizing this ceremony would help in having children. The other religious reason for the planting of these trees is that leaves of these trees are needed in most of the religious ceremonies. Planting of trees in *chautārās* and in other places was also motivated by the Sanskrit text that says that if one preserves nature, nature will preserve him/her. The trees (especially the *pipal*) were worshipped by women regularly for the wellbeing of the family.

The trees generally planted in *chautārās* were also having medicinal values. Especially the *pipal* tree was considered to have high medicinal value. If people had wounds they used to get a small piece of the bark of the tree, which was powdered and put into the wounds. The wound would become dry soon which would help in natural healing.

In the past, it was also a practice to construct a pond by the side of a *chautārā*. In the pond rain water was collected. This water was useful for irrigation and feeding animals. At the center of the ponds a wooden pillar was dug. Every year people would worship that wooden pillar.

There used to be a provision of drinking water in the *chautārā* in summer. This was essentially meant for the pedestrians. A large earthen pot was placed in a whole dug in the *chautārā*. A lid and a small pot was also placed there. Every day the local people would fill the pot with clean and fresh water. At certain times of the year, people would mix water with boiled sugarcane juice. All these works were performed voluntary, solely for the purpose of earning religious merit.

It is now difficult to say how many *chautārās* were there in Pokhara. A document which listed the *chautārās* in 1977 revealed that there were 632

chautārās then. In 2000, we counted only 278 *chautārās* in whole of Pokhara. This shows that in a period of 23 years, 354 or 56 % *chautārās* were destroyed. In Table 1, the ward-wise existence of *chautārās* in 1977 and in 2000 is shown. This Table also shows the percentage of *chautārās* lost in these 23 years. The Table shows that *chautārās* from Wards 1, 2, 4, 9, 10 and 13 were lost in proportionately more numbers.

There are several reasons for the lost of these *chautārās*. The impact of the cultural and political changes has already been discussed. But visibly, it is seen that political bodies destroyed these trees and *chautārās* in the name of physical development. The roads were expanded and new roads were built, which required destruction of these trees. Similarly, extension of electricity and telephone lines also led to cutting down of these trees. Most importantly, these trees were the sources of revenue for the local political units. These trees were generally sold to brick factories which were so much flourishing at that time. The indiscriminate felling of trees was motivated by the newly emerging concept that trees were required in villages and their presence in city is unsuitable.

In every community of Pokhara, there used to be at least few (2-5) grooves of mangoes and other fruit trees. As they were used by all members of the community, they could be called as community orchards. The mango trees were tall and difficult to climb. People used to have only the fallen trees. All the members of the community had equal access to the fruits of these trees. These trees were of special attraction to the children. They would consume only the fallen fruits. Except for a one or two such orchards, all seem to have disappeared. These trees were mostly sold by the local political units to earn cash income which was generally invested in physical infrastructures.

At a time when trees are increasingly used to maintain the ecological balance in urban areas, it is a sad thing that already existed and locally adapted trees were destroyed to such an extent. The importance of these local trees for reducing the effects of air and noise pollution has already been explained. Now in the name of greenery, new exotic trees have been planted. But their sustainability and the ecological and socio-cultural importance would be certainly less than the locally adapted traditional trees. Because of the importance of trees in controlling the increase in temperature due to heat trapping in urban areas, the traditional *chautārās* and trees would have played an important role. Accordingly, it would have been wise to preserve those trees.

Table 1: Number of *chautārās* in Pokhara in 1977 and in 2000.

Ward Number	1977	2000	Loss (%age)
1	22	7	68.2
2	22	7	68.2
3	7	4	42.8
4	18	6	66.7
5	35	18	48.6
6	53	35	40.0
7	53	24	57.7
8	49	22	55.1
9	55	9	83.7
10	37	8	78.4
11	57	22	57.9
12	46	21	54.3
13	35	12	65.7
14	30	17	43.3
15	38	14	63.1
16	32	20	37.5
17	17	17	0.0
18	26	15	42.3
Total	632	278	56.0

Water ponds: The name Pokhara comes from the fact that it had many Pokharis (water ponds). Therefore, the name of the town itself gives the indication that there were several water bodies. Pokhara had many natural as well as manmade water bodies. Out of the 7 natural lakes, 3 are considerably bigger. Other four have already been extinct or are on the verge of extinction. These lakes were created through a geological process. As the Seti river carried the moraine from Annapurna Himalayas after the burst of glacial lakes at various pre-historical time periods, the moraine were deposited on the routes of the rivers. This caused formation of natural lakes.

Apart from these natural lakes, people also had made several water ponds. At every community or neighborhoods, there would be at least 2-3 water ponds. These ponds were made from religious as well as practical point of view. These ponds were needed for the collection of rain water. The stored water was used for irrigation, feeding animals and also for washing if necessary. As the households were not connected to water pipes, these ponds

were essential to meet the necessity of water. For drinking water people depended on other sources like springs, wells, lakes and the like. It is even seen that when animals suffered from FMD (foot and mouth disease – with sores on foot and mouth), these animals were made to stand on the ponds for a week. It was believed that this practice would cure the disease, and then animals were taken to the homestead.

As mentioned in the previous section, religious ponds were generally located by the side of *chautārās*. As a matter of fact it was a custom to build a pond while building the *chautārās*. The reason is not clear, but it seems to have some practical value. As the trees on *chautārās* would harbor various birds, water ponds would also be useful for the birds to drink the water. Moreover, water ponds by the side of *chautārās* would store water for a long time as the shade of the huge trees would prevent the loss of water through evaporation.

It is not clear whether people had consciously understood the distant role of these water ponds like controlling the temperature and recharging the underground water table. This recharging water table was certainly essential for the proper functioning of springs, wells, and the like. It is a major method by which water scarcity is met in desert areas. This is also followed to revive the lost water bodies like rivers, wells, springs and the like in water-scarce areas.

An inventory of ponds made in 1977 in Pokhara reveals that there were about 156 manmade water ponds. In 2000, only 13 of them were seen. This shows that 92 % of these water ponds have been destroyed. The data is shown in Table 2. The table shows that there are only 3 water ponds in Ward 18, and one each in Wards 7, 11, 16 and 17. In all other Wards, water ponds were completely destroyed. Even those water ponds which are seen now are in extremely sorry state. They are on the verge of extinction due to siltation. Their size has shrunk considerably due to encroachment for private ownership of land, where houses have also been built.

Table 2: Water ponds existed in Pokhara in 1977 and in 2000.

Ward Number	1977	2000	Loss (%age)
1	5	—	100.0
2	3	—	100.0
3	2	—	100.0
4	4	—	100.0
5	11	—	100.0
6	6	—	100.0
7	10	1	90.0
8	16	—	100.0
9	16	—	100.0
10	21	—	100.0
11	18	1	95.0
12	18	—	100.0
13	14	2	85.7
14	9	2	77.7
15	10	2	80.0
16	4	1	75.0
17	1	1	0.0
18	13	3	76.9
Total	156	13	91.7

One of the main reasons for the disappearance of water ponds is that they were not maintained regularly. In the past they were cleaned regularly. The mud collected (due to siltation) at the bottom of the ponds was removed every year through co-operation of the concerned people. As the need of the ponds declined because of decline in agriculture and livestock raising, people ceased to maintain these ponds. As water taps were developed, the problem of water was also reduced. This led to the disappearance of the water ponds. Later on the powerful and wealthier households obtained legal ownership on the lands where water ponds existed.

As these ponds used to be dirty, development workers also suggested that such ponds would harbor mosquitoes, which were responsible for the malaria disease. This concept also helped in destroying the water ponds. Expansion of roads and development of infrastructure were other reasons for destroying the water ponds.

While Pokhara now suffers from water scarcity as well as rising heat, these ponds would have also been useful had they been maintained and cleaned properly.

Public land

The evidence as to the extent of public land in Pokhara is not available. Most of the lands used for public purpose have now been used on a private basis. Elders of Pokhara recall that there were 26 huge public grounds and the name of the locality was also based on the name of those public grounds. Now people remember only a few names of these grounds like – Batulachaur (round pasture/ground), Lamachaur (long ground), Simalchaur (field with cottonwood trees), Banghapatan (barren field), Malepatan, Bhimkalipatan, Majheripatan, and the like. These grounds were either used as pastures or as playing fields and for other public functions. By 2000, most of these huge public fields were gone. Only a few have remained, but have shrunk to a considerable degree.

In an inventory of public lands made in 1977, there was a mention of plots of public lands, but areas of some of the plots were not given. The record shows that there were 216 plots used as public open space, but by 2000, there were only 66 such plots. This shows that public lands were lost by about 67% in a period of 23 years. It is shown in Table 3. From Wards 10 and 13, all public lands were converted into private lands. But in 1977, these Wards had 23 and 18 plots of public lands, respectively. In that period of 23 years, about two-thirds of public lands disappeared from Wards 1, 9, 11, 15 and 17.

In 1977's record, the area of only 146 plots was given. The total area of those plots was estimated at 4,405 *ropani* (1 ha = 20 *ropani*). This means that average area of a public land could have been about 30 *ropani*. Considering that there were 216 plots, the total public area in 1977 could have been 6,561 *ropani*. But the study conducted in 2000 reveals that there was only 1,621 *ropani* of public land left in a period of last 23 years. This means that about 72% of the public land area has been lost in a period of 23 years, from 1977 to 2000. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 3: Number of public land plots in Pokhara in 1977 and 2000.

Ward Number	1977	2000	Loss (%age)
1	6	1	83.3
2	6	3	50.0
3	5	3	40.0
4	6	3	50.0
5	6	3	50.0
6	19	10	47.4
7	9	5	44.4
8	18	12	33.3
9	17	4	76.5
10	23	—	100.0
11	20	7	65.0
12	11	5	54.5
13	18	—	100.0
14	12	5	58.3
15	16	3	81.2
16	*	—	—
17	10	3	70.0
18	14	6	57.1
Total	216	73	66.2

* There is no mention of public lands in Ward 16 in the inventory made in 1977.

Apart from the public lands, a causal study was also conducted regarding other properties like temples, *pāti* and *pauwās* and public (common) trees. There has been no reduction in number of temples, *pāti* and *pauwā*, even though some of them were in bad shape in recent times. But with regard to other public trees, there has been a reduction in their numbers by almost 50%. These common trees were useful fruits, flower, fodder and religious, and timber trees. All were indigenous species. Most of these trees belonged to 20 different species.

Table 4: Areas of public lands in 1977 and 2000 in Pokhara
(1 ha = 20 *ropani*)

Ward Number	Area in 1977 (according to incomplete record) (<i>ropani</i>)	Estimated land area in 1977 (<i>ropani</i>)	Estimated land area in 2000 (<i>ropani</i>)	Decrease in land area (%age)
1	164	164	28	82.9
2	33	34	16	52.9
3	47	47	28	40.4
4	52	52	26	50.0
5	435	436	218	50.0
6	104*	323**	165	47.3
7	85	85	47	44.7
8	122	122	97	20.5
9	1020*	1140**	268	76.5
10	426	426	0	100.0
11	514*	694**	243	64.9
12	292*	442**	201	54.5
13	989*	1079**	0	100.0
14	75*	315**	131	58.4
15	10*	460**	86	81.3
16	-*	30**	0	100.0
17	37*	277*	83	70.0
18	-	420	180	57.1
Total	4,450	6,536	1,817	72.2

* Area has not been specified for all land plots.

** Including the estimated area of land plots whose actual area has not been specified.

It is seen from above description that public open spaces have been severely encroached upon by the individuals. Using the political and economic power, individuals registered most of the public lands under their private ownership. The question then arises as to why they were encroached upon.

To manage the Pokhara's urban problems, Pokhara Valley Town Development Committee was established in 1975. Just before that a scientific survey of the town was carried out. Even then the Committee was not able to work properly. The inability to implement the regulations

properly by the Committee was found to have led to encroachment of public land. For example, the Committee aimed to keep environment around Phewa lake clean and pollution free, maintain the standard regarding the lake area and its boundaries, conserve the public properties, developing needed parks, and develop spots for Phewa view. But none of these objectives were achieved. All the government norms have not been followed and land around the lake have been encroached upon and made private. Still then, the Committee has not done much to restrict these trends. The media reports that even the land covered by lake water has been registered under private ownership. But people do not know the reality.

The encroachment of public land by unscrupulous individuals is intense in Pokhara. Using different excuses and pretensions, public lands have been made private. Based on hereditary rights (*paitrik hak*), thousands of *ropanis* have been claimed by the people under their private ownership. Government's resettlement programs have taken about 2,000 *ropanis* of public land. Apart from that lands in important places have been encroached upon by *sukumbasis* (landless people having no property at all) and *hukumbasis* (powerful people grabbing public land under the name of squatters). About 1,000 *ropani* land has been taken over by this process. The other processes by which public lands have been converted to private lands are *sorayani* and *guthi* encroachment. These processes are discussed below.

Hereditary claim (*paitrik hakdabi*): The main reason for the encroachment of public lands in Pokhara is the 'hereditary claim'. Before 1934, there was a concept that land should not be left fallow. The state badly required a large sum of revenue. To collect more and more revenue from the lands, the *jimmawals* and *mukhiyas* (the land revenue collectors) were appointed in every village. They were to submit the pre-fixed amount of revenue from the village(s) under their jurisdiction. If they could not collect the revenue to the stipulated land, they themselves had to pay the tax. To raise the required amount of taxes, they had given lands to people for cultivation and other purpose. If that tax was not paid, the revenue collectors would pay the tax and use the land until the tax was paid. In many cases these revenue collectors had levied taxes on pastures, forest and open land. These were called *khartari tiro* (pasture or grass tax). Later on there were several conflicts on the ownership of land between villages and between individuals based on this *khartari tiro*. This historical reality means that the elites of the villages had at some points paid taxes on various pieces of land. The receipts

of these taxes are now increasingly used for claiming ownership on public land. A large proportion of public land has already been made private on the basis of evidence of the payment of tax in the past.

In 1974 all the lands in Pokhara was surveyed on a scientific basis. After the survey, all the public lands should have been identified and recorded. From 1977 the process of registering lands on the basis of *khartari tiro* (tax – see above) was stopped. But still then the process of giving private ownership based on past tax record is still continuing. Some clever and unscrupulous people have been able to create various evidence to claim such public lands. In many cases they also have been successful in doing that. In some cases, the government has also cancelled the land registration (transferring from public ownership to private ownership) under public pressure. In Table 5, the lands whose transfer of ownership to individuals has been cancelled because of public pressure are shown. But this is just the tip of the iceberg as people would not know much about such transfer process which takes place silently in the government office.

While claiming the public land under 'hereditary claim', the general practice is that people give application to the Land Revenue Office saying that their name were left out while registering the land. For this the following documents need to be submitted.

- The evidence of the claim specifying the area (*bij-mana*).
- Receipt of tax paid.
- Copy of citizenship certificate.
- The recommendation of the respective Ward Office.
- The recommendation of the respective VDC or Municipality Office.
- The field checking (*sarjain muchulka*) from Land Revenue Office.
- The decision of the 'land registration committee' of the Land Revenue Office.
- Notice to the respective VDC or Municipality about the land registration.
- Notice in the local print media.

Table 5: The lands whose ownership as private property has been cancelled because of public pressure (as of 2000)

Cases	Ward Number	Plot Number*	Area (<i>ropani-anna-paisa-dam</i>)**	Remarks
1	15	382	5-10-3-3	Now public
2	15	383	3-8-03	Now public
3	15	384	5-0-02	Now public
4	15	145	0-12-3-1	Now public
5	15	2	19-0-0-3	Now under SOS
6	15	591	191-0-0-0	Now as a writ in supreme court
7	10	282	17-13-0-1	Now under the name of Amarsing high school
8	17	1793	0-5-0-0	Now under the name Pokhara air traffic office

* as in cadastral maps.

** (20 *ropani* = 1 ha; 16 *annas* = 1 *ropani*; 4 *paisa* = 1 *anna*; 4 *dam* = 1 *paisa*).

Source: various media reports

Despite the fact that one can make up a case for the claim of public land based on above papers, it is extremely difficult for the Land Revenue Office to identify whether the person claiming the land is genuinely the owner of the land. Similarly, it is extremely difficult for the Office to identify whether the land being claimed is a public land. It is still unclear as to what is the public land. If the *chautārās* and the water ponds are to be considered as public properties, there are several examples in Pokhara of the ponds being under the private lands and now being sold and bought in land markets. If pastures and forests have to be considered as public land, there are no such lands existing in Pokhara. Even the forests which are considered as important for promoting tourism have been registered under private ownership by fabricating and creating various evidences. Even though the process of registering public lands into private ownership has been continuing, there have been public outcries about it.

Government's resettlement programs

The role of government's resettlement programs is also important for the loss of public lands in Pokhara. Even though these programs can be justified under the humanitarian and moral points of view, but they have been used for gaining political favors and for individual self-interest. In 1976, there was a huge landslide problem in Majhathana of Kaski District, and those victims of the disaster were settled in Wards 14, 15 and 18. About 232 families were resettled in Pokhara. Each family had been allocated with 8 *ropani* land and in total 1,850 *ropani* land was distributed. Only a few of them have got the land titles, and the rest of the land allocated for them have been claimed by others under their private property. After this disaster and resettlement, Pokhara now frequently receives victims of landslides and natural disasters. But in reality they are found to be used for political purpose. For example, people living in a large squatter settlement now developed behind the Bus Park and the Airport were brought there because they favored the then Panchayati political system in a referendum in 1979.

Squatters' settlements

After examining the process of public land encroachment, it is revealed that squatters' settlements is another major factor behind this process. It was in 1972 that squatter settlement began to develop in Pokhara. In this year, the existing bus park in front of the old airport office was transferred to the present location on the north side of the airport. The 73 families staying at the

old bus park were given a piece of land in the new bus park. But in reality land was made available for 150 families. Now there is a large squatter settlement around the new bus park. It is also observed in the field visits that there are several huts in the bus park and near the road which are rented out to the migrant workers and the traders. These huts are owned by the powerful people. The rent was found to range from Rs 3,000 to Rs 8,000. The tenants staying there did not know the owners, who use agents to collect the rent. This shows that power has been misused for the individual benefit. This practice is not an unique feature of this place only; it is a common practice in Pokhara.

There are more than 40 squatter settlements in Pokhara, and about 4,500 families live there. In reality only 13% of them are the genuine squatters. The rest are mainly the poor people who have come to Pokhara for work. It is very difficult to tell the exact population of squatters in Pokhara. Sometimes, over a night, 3000-4000 huts of squatters can be seen constructed. Under pressure from government, they also seem to disappear. It is generally observed that when the government policies and supervision are weak, more squatters seem to appear and occupy the public land. This makes it difficult to get accurate picture of squatter settlements. Various studies also give differing accounts because of the same reason. A study conducted by Pokhara Municipality has estimated that squatter population has been growing in Pokhara by 26% a year. If this rate of growth is maintained, squatter population will account up to 55% of the Pokhara's total population in 2021. If this happens, there will be almost no any piece of public land in Pokhara.

Soryani encroachment

This is a slow and gradual process of encroaching the public land. This practice is also common in Pokhara. People slowly extend the border of their land towards the public land. Similarly they encroach the public land under the excuse of making their plots straight. In some cases people have given certain help to schools and in return have got recommendations from the school authority and political units to extend their lands into the public lands.

Guthi encroachment

Guthi lands (land donated to religious institutions) which are also considered as public property have also been encroached. From ancient times, temples were constructed and religious institutions formed from the cultural and

social reasons. To look after these infrastructures and institutions, land-grants were assigned to them, the income of which was used to meet the expenses required. The lands like *pakho* (dry land, upland), *khet* (lowland for paddy cultivation) and even forests had been assigned as *guthis*. These *guthis* were also common in Pokhara. But large parts of these religious lands have also been encroached and made private. This process is still under going.

The major *guthis* in Pokhara include: Bindyabasini *guthi*, Bhairavthan *guthi* and Bhimsen *guthi* in Ward 2; Narayan *guthi* in Ward 3; Barahi *guthi* in Ward 6; Jalpadevi *guthi* in Ward 8; Ramghat Santiban *guthi* in Ward 9; Gita temple and Shivalaya *guthi* in Ward 11; Sitaladevi *guthi* in Ward 12; Bhadrakali *guthi* in Ward 13; Siddeshowr *guthi* in Ward 15; Sitapaila and Ram temple *Guthi* in Ward 17. Of these *guthis*, 30 *ropani khet* (paddy land) in Biruwa field which was allocated to Sitapaila temple have been registered by the *guthiars* (who look after the temple) under the condition that they pay Rs 30,000 a year to the temple. The *pakho* (dry land) is under the process of registration in the name of *guthiars*. In most other *guthis*, *guthiars* have themselves registered *guthi* lands under their private ownership. There is a case pending in court in relation to *guthis* of Ramghat. It is now seen that unless some drastic and strict measures are not taken and the *guthi* committee is not made active, almost all *guthis* will disappear as public property.

Conclusion

This study conducted on the public properties of Pokhara reveals that these properties have been lost in an increasing rate. In a period of 23 years from 1977 to 2000, 56 % of the *chautārās*, 92 % water ponds, 70 % of the plots of public lands and 72 % of the public land area have been lost, or converted to private ownership. There has not been encroachment on temples, *patis* and *pauwas*.

It is then clearly evident that public properties maintained and developed in the past for the use of the society have been destroyed as the urbanization and modernization proceeded in Pokhara. As the planners and political leaders considered these public properties as given – not as the product of human endeavors – they were not sensitive to them even though they could be useful to urban society also. The public properties (like *chautārās*, community orchards, common trees, water ponds and open space) - which were generally considered as nature – were thought to be useful only for the rural people. These properties were also considered as symbols of

backwardness. This essentially means that urban society was separated from the nature. These properties were thought to be out of place in an urban society considered as *shabya* (civilized). The nature (represented by these properties in the mind of policy makers and planners) is linked only with the uncivilized village people (*pākhe*, *ashabya*, *gaule*-folk).

Apart from the above conceptions, the change in social composition of the population of Pokhara is also linked with the loss of the public properties discussed above. The dominant ethnic groups before and during the early phase of urbanization were Brahmins and Chettris who were strongly influenced by Hindu religion and its description of nature like trees. The various public properties described here were developed based on the belief of Hindu norms which gave considerable weight on the preservation of trees, water ponds, *chautārās*, and community orchids. The mode of production like agriculture and animal husbandry was also responsible for the development and maintenance of these properties. But as the urbanization process brought in new people who became dominant in politics and policy making because of their new-found wealth, the public properties developed in different religious and economic context did not receive much sympathy and attention. As a result there was indiscriminate destruction of these properties.

The government policy has not been sensitive as to the creation and existence of these open spaces, but just considered that it is the free gift of nature to be used and distributed for political benefits. The result now is seen in the lack of free open space for recreational use of the common people. The common people and their children do not have access to open space for sports, leisure, and the like. Even the municipality could not develop adequate services like toilets and libraries because there are no free public spaces available in the core town area. Now it is also difficult to take over private lands by the government, even though in the past it was easy to do so.

From the study of an inventory prepared by the then Pokhara Municipality in 1977 about the public properties in Pokhara and this study conducted in 2000 about the status of these properties, it seems that the following measures by the relevant office (government office and Pokhara Municipality) have to be immediately taken for stopping the further loss of these properties.

- Clearly indicate the borders of the public lands and specify the plot numbers and their areas.
- Specify the land occupied by the public buildings, government offices, schools, universities, hospitals and the like.
- Keep the record of the existing temples, *patis*, *pauwas*, *chautārās*, park and the like and renovate these properties if necessary.
- Keep the record of the *guthi* lands and take measures to preserve them.
- The related office (e.g., Pokhara Municipality) should form a committee to study the remaining and lost public lands and take steps to recover those lost lands, and then preserve them.

It is now certain that if strong measures are not taken for the protection of the public properties in Pokhara, no public property will remain in near future. It is mainly the responsibility of the government to take such steps, but citizens and residents of the town should also show readiness in helping the government in this regard. Then only it can be hoped that the existing public properties can be saved for the future generation.

Notes

This article is based on a research carried out by the author under the financial support of Ford Foundation, New Delhi. The research grant was made available to Martin Chautari, a discussion group based in Kathmandu. The author is now the convener of this group. In the field, Min Bahadur Giri, supported in the collection of data and information.

1. Various studies conducted in Pokhara are described in Adhikari and Seddon (2002).
2. During the study of Shroeder, Batulechaur was a rural area, but it is now placed under Pokhara municipality.
3. Various persons interviewed for the historical information include first secretary (Krishnaji Sharma) of Pokhara municipality when it was established in 1959, the then local land revenue collector Jimmwal Purna Bahadur Baniya and an elderly woman of Pokhara Uttara Kumari Palikhe.
4. The present day Nepal was divided into several microstates (about 80) before its unification. The process of unification was led by the king Prithiwi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, one of the microstates existed then. The kingdom of Nepal was created in 1969 when he conquered the Kathmandu valley. The unification and territorial expansion continued till 1816, when Nepal was defeated by East-India company (Britain), which had colonized India then. Kaski is now one of the 75 districts of Nepal.
5. The headquarters of Kaski kingdom, located on a hill top overlooking the Pokhara valley.

6. The squatters (*sukumbāsis*) are those people who do not possess any property (land or other assets including money) and who stay in public land without any title of ownership. Even though some of the squatters have also obtained land titles, their neighborhoods are still called squatter settlements (*sukumbāsi basti*).

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EXPLAINING DISPARATE ECONOMIC SUCCESS IN HIGHLAND NEPAL: OPPORTUNITY, COOPERATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MANANG

Clint Rogers

Nepal is a country marked by poverty and development challenges, especially in its rural highland areas where residents are primarily engaged in subsistence-level agriculture and pastoralism made difficult by a short growing season at high altitude. Remote from concentrated population centers, roads, markets, and sources of capital, the inhabited areas of Nepal's Himalayan highlands are generally characterized by a low level of commercial activity.¹ But a few highland communities stand out in Nepal due to the widespread involvement of their members in business ventures and their relative economic success and high standards of living.² This disparity in economic success among communities is quite striking, particularly since Nepal's Himalayan highland communities share a similar environmental and cultural milieu. Over the course of the past few decades, the causes of this disparity have been the subject of some scholarly focus.³

Explaining Disparate Economic Success in Highland Nepal

In the 1970s, as areas of Nepal's Himalayan highlands were increasingly opened to researchers, nascent scholarly attention devoted to the region's inhabitants developed into an academic debate over the factors involved in the differential level of commercial involvement and economic success among the various communities throughout the region. This debate was framed by two published works, a book written by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1975) and a subsequent article by Andrew Manzardo (1977). Both of these works focused on the historical involvement of Nepal's highland communities in trade across the Himalaya mountain range between Nepal and Tibet.

Throughout Nepal's Himalayan highlands, environmental constraints on agricultural and pastoral production imposed by high altitude have long forced the regions' inhabitants to look for external commercial means to supplement their local subsistence economies. Prior to the advent of mountain tourism in Nepal in the 1960s, trade had been the primary form of commercial activity available to the country's highland peoples. The Himalaya mountain range forms the dividing line between two disparate but complementary economic zones, the high plateau of Tibet and the lower hills and plains of Nepal and India, a situation which gave rise to a demand for trade across the mountains. Historically, this trade primarily consisted of the exchange of salt and wool from the Tibetan highlands for rice grown in the lowlands.

Trans-Himalayan trade came to a virtual halt in the 1960s as a result of the occupation of Tibet by communist China and the increased availability in Nepal of goods from India. The supply of Tibetan goods to Nepal's hill regions dried up with the closing of the Tibetan border by occupying Chinese forces following a failed Tibetan uprising against Chinese occupation and the flight of Tibet's leader the Dalai Lama and thousands of his followers from Tibet in 1959. Even after Chinese authorities re-opened the Tibetan border to limited trade, it was under tight Chinese control and not nearly as lucrative for Nepal's highland trading communities as it had been. During the same time frame, the demand for Tibetan goods in Nepal was dealt a serious blow by the construction, with international development assistance, of roads linking the interior of Nepal with India. The improved transportation links increased the availability and lowered the price of Indian goods in Nepal and enabled imported Indian goods to widely replace Tibetan ones (von Furer-Haimendorf 1975).

But even while trans-Himalayan trade was thriving, levels of involvement and success in trade varied greatly among the communities inhabiting Nepal's Himalayan highlands. This variation can largely be attributed to the availability of commercial opportunities in trade not being uniform throughout the region. There were two primary reasons for this non-uniformity: geographic location and government-sanctioned privileges.

Although the Himalaya mountain range poses a formidable barrier to travel, there are several crossable points that served as natural corridors for trade. Based on the proximity of their home regions to such corridors, some highland communities were historically better situated than others to engage in and benefit economically from trans-Himalayan trade. Other geographical

factors also came to bear. For example, since pack animals were essential to large scale trans-Himalayan trade, communities with large numbers of livestock suitable for use in transporting goods could better participate in trade. Because of the unfeasibility of travel across high mountain passes snowbound in winter and across mudslides and raging torrents in lowland areas during Nepal's summer monsoon, trade between Tibet and lowland Nepal was necessarily a disjointed operation requiring both the seasonal storage of trade goods and a change between different types of pack animals at suitable altitudes. Thus, the geography and associated ecological attributes of some communities' home regions positioned those communities to take economic advantage of the peculiarities of trans-Himalayan trade (von Furer-Haimendorf 1975, Manzardo 1977).

Some communities were able to enhance their ability to take advantage of commercial opportunities in trade by obtaining special privileges from the Nepal government. In an effort to control and capitalize economically on trans-Himalayan trade, the Nepal government historically granted trade monopolies to several communities, or in some cases to individuals within those communities.⁴ The Nepal government collected customs taxes on the large scale trade conducted along major trade routes, and the granting of trade monopolies, by reducing the number of participants and inducing their cooperation with government authorities, made regulation of trade and collection of customs taxes easier for the government (Messerschmidt and N. Gurung 1974, von Furer-Haimendorf 1975, Regmi 1984:123-124, Schrader 1988).

While pointing out the important roles of geographic location and government-sanctioned privileges in providing advantages to certain of Nepal's highland trading communities, von Furer-Haimendorf (1975) credited economically successful communities with certain cultural characteristics amenable to their members' widespread involvement and success in trade. For instance, von Furer-Haimendorf emphasized the wide scope for individual choice and risk taking in economic activities among members of Himalayan highland communities. Contrasting the Buddhist culture of highland communities with that of Hindus in lower lying areas of Nepal, von Furer-Haimendorf suggested that highlanders were free agents from an early age without constricting economic obligations to a joint family dominated by an elderly patriarch, since at marriage they establish a separate household with the inheritance of parental property individually apportioned among siblings. In addition, von Furer-Haimendorf pointed to the lack, again

relative to lowland Hindus, of social hierarchy and social restrictions among both men and women in Himalayan highland culture that would otherwise hinder personal interactions and relations with trade partners from other regions and make distant travel for trade difficult.

The importance von Furer-Haimendorf placed on cultural factors was challenged by Manzardo (1977), who argued that, together with geographic location and government-sanctioned privileges, ecological advantages and constraints rather than cultural characteristics were primarily responsible for different communities' variable involvement in trade. In particular, Manzardo emphasized the role of local natural resources in supporting the keeping of pack animals used to transport trade goods, arguing that communities with adequate pasturage for large numbers of pack animals could engage in trade to a greater extent.

In a subsequent comparative analysis of highland Nepal's more economically successful trading communities, Heiko Schrader (1988) bridged the Haimendorf-Manzardo debate by suggesting that economic success in trade depended upon the combination of favorable location, ecology, and government-sanctioned privileges (all of which can be considered forms of commercial opportunity) with beneficial cultural characteristics. To get around another issue in the Haimendorf-Manzardo debate, namely the Weberian-Marxian question of whether socio-cultural forms determine economic forms or vice versa, Schrader maintained that economic and socio-cultural forms mutually influence each other.

Barbara Parker (1988) contributed to the debate with an article focusing on the significance to a community's economic success of what she termed a "culture of entrepreneurship" among the community's members in combination with local control over local economic surplus. In particular, Parker attributed the heavy involvement in commercial ventures by Nepal's Thakali community to "a powerful cultural impetus toward trade, investment, and capital accumulation" that developed under circumstances of geography (namely the isolated location and relatively poor natural resources of the community's homeland) that enabled the community to maintain control over its own economic resources. Thus, Parker credited the lack of oppressive expropriation (i.e. heavy taxation) of local economic surplus by external authorities with enabling the culturally entrepreneurial Thakali to reinvest their earnings and thus increase their involvement in commercial enterprise.

In her study of several of Nepal's more enterprising ethnic groups, Laurie Zivetz (1992) pointed out the importance to entrepreneurial activity of a

supportive cultural environment, access to capital, and government policies that encourage private enterprise. Zivetz noted that members of village communities are often precluded from entrepreneurial activity due to cultural conservatism and limited capital. As a result, she suggested that commercial opportunities and sources of credit were necessary to provide the incentives and the means, respectively, for community members to pursue commercial endeavors.

To the mix of factors affecting the disparate success in trade achieved by various highland communities, Wim van Spengen (1992) added the geo-historical influence of state politics and international market dynamics. He argued that the Nepal government's regulation of trade, which effectively restricted open competition between groups, was a result of political relations between the government and individual groups. He maintained that special trade privileges or monopolies were granted to particular groups by the government in order to achieve border containment security by bringing those groups closer to the government and thereby controlling against separatism. He also pointed out the importance to trans-Himalayan trade, and hence to the highland trading communities that brought the disparate markets of South and Central Asia together, of the historical emergence and development and eventually the drying up and shifting to other channels of trade flows.

The curtailment of trans-Himalayan trade severely affected those Himalayan highland communities in Nepal that had depended upon it as an essential supplement to local subsistence-level agro-pastoralism. Many members of those communities were forced to migrate, either seasonally or permanently, to more urbanized lower lying regions in search of alternative economic opportunities. But some communities were able to turn to mountain tourism as a supplemental economic activity as Nepal's popularity as an international adventure tourism destination grew in the 1970s and thereafter.

As was the case with trans-Himalayan trade, some of Nepal's highland communities have been better situated than others to participate in the business of tourism, with geographic location and government-sanctioned privileges again serving as major determining factors. Due to border sensitivities with China, the Nepal government has dictated exactly where foreign tourists are allowed to travel, opening some highland areas and leaving others, particularly those with easy access to Tibet, off-limits. Among those highland areas open to trekking tourism, some have benefited from

government-developed transportation infrastructure making them easier to access, an important factor in attracting large numbers of tourists. The Nepal government has also controlled the number of tourists visiting some highland areas by imposing annual quotas and charging high entry fees. Together with the level of infrastructure development, entry restrictions and radically different fees levied by the Nepal government for visiting different areas have funneled most trekking tourists to just a few regions.

Although numerous scholarly and popular works have been written about tourism in Nepal, most have focused on the perceived negative effects of tourism on local residents and the natural environment while very few have addressed the varying degree of economic success in tourism among the country's highland communities. Most authors seem to have been content with considering the various communities' tourism economies to be driven by tourist demand (as influenced by travel restrictions, visitor fees, infrastructure development, and the attractiveness of the local environment) with little regard for the supply side effect generated by the response of particular communities to available opportunities in tourism. But there are a few noteworthy exceptions.

Sherry Ortner (1998) took the position that certain cultural characteristics attributed to the Sherpa ethnic group residing in Nepal's Khumbu region have contributed to the group's economic success in tourism. For example, Ortner demonstrated how, in their dealings with foreign visitors, Sherpas have benefited from what visitors widely see as a friendly, good-natured, cheerful approach to working in tourism. Vincanne Adams (1996) went even further in claiming that Khumbu Sherpas deliberately employed manipulative inter-cultural strategies in order to benefit economically from their relations with wealthy foreign tourists. And Jim Fisher (1990) described how improvements in local education levels as a result of schools funded by foreign visitors positively affected the way Sherpas in the Solu-Khumbu area have been able to take advantage of commercial opportunities in tourism. But while describing ways in which the Khumbu Sherpa community has taken advantage of commercial opportunities in tourism, each of these authors was quick to point out that the existence of those opportunities in the first place has been primarily due to the proximity of the community's home region to Nepal's most famous tourist destination, Mount Everest.

Each of the scholarly works mentioned above has contributed to our understanding of the factors involved in the disparate economic success of Nepal's highland communities, be it in the business of trade or tourism. An

interesting characteristic of the debate outlined above is that rather than diminishing the credibility of prior arguments, each contribution has instead generally incorporated and built upon the existing thinking. As a result, one is apt to believe that it has been a variety of factors identified by various scholars rather than any single factor that has enabled certain communities to achieve economic success. For example, the availability of even a compelling commercial opportunity would not by itself be enough to spur the emergence of entrepreneurial activity, but the availability of such a commercial opportunity to members of a community with an entrepreneurial culture and access to capital might be.

As a kind of summary then, by aggregating the explanatory factors highlighted in the various contributions outlined above, one might conclude that the economic success achieved by certain of Nepal's highland communities has been due to a favorable combination of available commercial opportunities (resulting from such factors as geographic location, ecological environment, government-sanctioned privileges, market dynamics, and infrastructure development), a culture that is not only open to but also encourages entrepreneurial activity, access to capital to finance business ventures, and a lack of business-hindering regulatory restrictions and economic expropriation.

Over the course of my own research on the rise of entrepreneurship in Manang, the home of one of the more enterprising communities in highland Nepal if not the entire country, I have not been surprised to find explanatory factors that correspond quite well with those found by prior researchers working in highland Nepal as summarized above. For example, the Manang community has benefited greatly from the availability to its members of significant commercial opportunities in both international trade and tourism. It has an extremely entrepreneurial culture where members are not only free to engage in business but feel compelled to do so as part of their very identity. The community's members have been able to access the necessary capital to finance a variety of business ventures without even resorting to the use of commercial credit. And the community has not only been free from external economic control and expropriation, its own regulation of private enterprise has remained remarkably business-friendly and free market oriented.

What *has* been surprising to me, however, has been the critical importance to the Manang community's economic success of something that has received comparably little attention from other scholars who have worked

in highland Nepal. The emergence of the Manang community as one of the leading entrepreneurial communities in Nepal can largely be attributed to its social systems of economic cooperation that have facilitated the widespread involvement of its members in private entrepreneurial ventures. Sufficient attention has not been given to the role that these systems have played in the Manang community's economic success or that similar systems could play in the economic success of other communities. This article is an attempt to balance that lack of attention.

The Manang Community

Manang is the name of a large village in the Nyishang region of north-central Nepal.⁵ Situated in a glacially carved valley between the Himalaya and Tibetan Marginal mountain ranges, Manang lies at an altitude of 3540 meters (11,615 feet) and is virtually surrounded by mountains over 6000 meters (20,000 feet) high. Nearly all the residents of Manang are Nyishangte, the ethnic group indigenous to the Nyishang region. The Nyishangte people number a little more than 5000, with nearly half of the population currently residing in their traditional homeland of Nyishang. Most of the others live in Nepal's capital city, Kathmandu – a result of massive urban migration by Nyishangte pursuing commercial opportunities in international trade in the 1970s and 1980s. What I refer to in this article as the Manang community includes the Nyishangte residents of Manang village and its subsidiary settlements of Tenki and Humde, a community with a current population of roughly 900.

Although quite poor as recently as the early 1960s, the Manang community has managed to rise to prominence in Nepal as one of the country's more economically successful village communities. The Nyishangte people have a colorful history of engaging in entrepreneurial activity, from trading in various countries of South and Southeast Asia, to running retail and hotel businesses in Kathmandu, to catering to foreign trekking tourists in their native region of Nyishang. But although Nyishangte involvement in entrepreneurial ventures can be traced back at least two centuries, it has only been during the past four decades that a significant proportion of the group has been able to achieve levels of economic success remarkable in Nepal.

What has been different about the Manang community that enabled it to achieve economic success while many other similar communities in Nepal's

Himalayan highlands have not? As one would expect from the debate summarized above, many factors have contributed to the Manang community's economic success. To put it in the simplest terms possible, the community has been largely comprised of fortunate opportunists who have, over time, recognized and aggressively pursued the commercial opportunities that have become available to them. Fundamental to its members' ability to aggressively take advantage of commercial opportunities, the community has remained relatively free from outside economic expropriation and has benefited from certain cultural characteristics, social systems, and regulatory policies that have greatly supported its members' involvement in private enterprise. Thus, while commercial opportunities were the essential seeds of entrepreneurship in Manang, infrastructure advancements facilitating access to those opportunities, economic autonomy allowing entrepreneurs to reap and keep the rewards presented by those opportunities, an entrepreneurial culture embracing private ownership and widespread involvement in business enterprise, social systems of economic cooperation enabling access to capital to finance business ventures, and a liberal, business-friendly regulatory climate provided the fertilizing nutrients for entrepreneurship to emerge and again re-emerge in what had been an economically disadvantaged environment.

But while each of these factors has played an important role in the community's economic success, it has been the relatively unique combination of all of them together that has served to distinguish the Manang community from less economically successful communities in highland Nepal. Indeed, autonomy from external expropriation, a culture open to widespread involvement in business, and a private enterprise friendly, laissez faire regulatory approach are commonly found among Nepal's Himalayan highland communities in general. What has effectively differentiated the Manang community from less economically successful highland communities has been the availability of significant commercial opportunities to its members and their efficacious use of various social systems of economic cooperation to access capital to finance business ventures.

To explain the relative economic success of the Manang community and contribute to our understanding of the causes of disparate economic success among communities in highland Nepal, this article examines the manner in which commercial opportunities have historically become available to the Manang community and the social systems of economic cooperation the community has used to support its members' involvement in business

ventures. In so doing, the article provides some interesting insights into the historic and recent emergence of widespread entrepreneurial activity among members of the Manang community.⁶

Commercial Opportunities

When one steps back to consider the Manang community's history of entrepreneurial activity, several watershed developments stand out as having broadly shaped the evolution of commercial opportunities available to the community's members. While it would be wrong to imply that these developments alone determined the history of entrepreneurial activity in Manang, nonetheless each of them was critical enough to characterize an important era in Manang's economic history.

The first of these watershed developments can be traced back to the late 18th century, when the king of Nepal granted the residents of Nyishang the privilege to travel freely throughout the country and an exemption from paying customs taxes on trade goods. The recognition and continuation of these privileges by subsequent rulers of Nepal over the next two centuries enabled the Nyishangte to gradually expand the geographic scale of their trading forays throughout Nepal, northern India, and as far afield as Southeast Asia.

The next watershed development for Nyishangte entrepreneurs came in the 1960s, when the king of Nepal made passports readily available to the residents of Nyishang, years in advance of their availability to members of other ethnic groups in Nepal. Prior to this, the number of Nyishangte traders venturing beyond Nepal and India had been limited by the difficulty of obtaining foreign passports and the time and hardship involved with such distant travel. But with the grant of Nepali passports negating the former limitation, Nyishangte traders' international business prospects began to grow rapidly in the 1960s by taking advantage of the initiation of jet airline service between Kathmandu and Southeast Asia, Nepal government programs aimed at promoting international trade, low trade restrictions in Southeast Asian markets, and the emergence of Kathmandu as an important trade entrepot for the burgeoning South Asian black market.

The convenience of airline connections to Southeast Asian market centers such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Hong Kong greatly increased Kathmandu's importance as a base for Nyishangte trade activities. In the 1970s, a large number of Nyishangte traders began moving to

Kathmandu in order to devote their undivided attention to the pursuit of trade business. While trade had previously been of a small scale, seasonal nature, it became a highly capitalized, year-round pursuit for an increasing number of Nyishangte and resulted in the accumulation of unprecedented levels of wealth within the community. Successful traders brought their families to live in Kathmandu, and by the end of the 1980s, more than half of the Nyishangte ethnic group had migrated to the city. With at least one member of practically every household engaged in trade ventures, the Nyishangte emerged as one of the more entrepreneurial and economically successful groups in all of Nepal.

The Nepal government's opening of the Nyishang region to international tourists in the late 1970s opened the door for the rise of tourism enterprise in Manang, as entrepreneurial village residents began to capitalize on the growing number of foreigners visiting Manang by establishing businesses catering to tourists. But tourism businesses in Manang developed slowly during the 1980s, both because the growth in tourist numbers was gradual and because the community's capital resources were still primarily used to finance members' trade activities.

The Manang community's emergence as prominent tourism entrepreneurs can be attributed to the simultaneous decline of the community's international trade prospects and rise of tourism business opportunities in Manang during the 1990s. The concurrent growth of opportunities in tourism and deterioration of those in trade enticed some entrepreneurs who had earlier moved to Kathmandu to return to Manang and attracted the capital of others who remained in Kathmandu. With an explosion of local involvement and investment in tourism business ventures in the late 1990s, the Nyishangte residents of Manang once again emerged as one of the more entrepreneurial communities in Nepal.

In terms congruent with the debate outlined earlier, the commercial opportunities that have become available to the Manang community can be seen as the result of geographic location, ecological environment, geopolitically motivated government-sanctioned privileges, market dynamics, and infrastructure development. The roles these factors have played in the availability of commercial opportunities to the community are described below.

The Role of Geographic Location and Ecological Environment

The geographic location of the Nyishang valley played a seminal role in the historical origins of entrepreneurial activity among the Nyishangte people in two fundamental ways. First of all, the valley's location in the arid, high altitude Trans-Himalaya region provided the essential motivation for its inhabitants to turn their attention to commercial ventures. Secondly, the isolated location of the Nyishang valley away from natural travel corridors linking Nepal and Tibet was critical to the initiation of its population's involvement in both trade abroad and tourism at home.

The Nyishang valley is located along the northern slope of a particularly imposing section of the Himalaya mountain range called the Annapurna Himal. This awesome wall of rock and ice reaches over 8,000 meters (26,000 feet) high and remains continuously above 5,500 meters (18,000 feet) for a distance of over 60 kilometers (40 miles), forming a barrier not only to human travel but to the effects of Nepal's wet summer monsoon weather as well. As a result of its location in the rain shadow of the Himalaya, Nyishang receives only a small fraction of the moisture carried to areas on the opposite side of the range by the summer monsoon that arises from the Bay of Bengal to the south.⁷

Along with the dry climate, Nyishang's altitude is a major constraining factor on agricultural and pastoral production. At such a high elevation, winters are cold and long and only one crop per year is feasible, in contrast to lower lying areas of Nepal where two or three crops per year are the norm. In addition, domestic animals such as cattle, goats, and horses must be kept indoors during the winter and fed dried grass stored in the autumn. As a result, the number of livestock that can be kept is limited by the amount of grass suitable for cutting that can be grown in the vicinity of villages in Nyishang's arid, high altitude environment.

The blend of agriculture and pastoralism practiced in Nyishang has been highly adapted over hundreds of years to the local environmental conditions. Nevertheless, the ecological constraints imposed by the environment have limited local agricultural and pastoral production to barely subsistence levels. Thus, the Nyishangte are similar to other groups residing in Nepal's Himalayan highlands in that ecological constraints imposed by an extreme environment have forced the group's members to look for external commercial means to supplement their limited local subsistence economy.

Historically, the primary commercial opportunity available to the residents of Nepal's Himalayan highlands was trade. However, due to the geographic location of their home region, the type of trade pursued by the Nyishangte was very different than that of other highland groups in Nepal. As mentioned already, the location of some highland communities along natural travel corridors crossing the Himalaya mountain range played a critical role in the ability of those communities to participate in trans-Himalayan trade. Relative to other groups, the Nyishangte were poorly situated in this sense.

Due to the boxed-in location of the Nyishang valley, there was no direct travel route between Nyishang and Tibet. In order to reach Tibet, the Nyishangte had to pass through the neighboring regions of Mustang or Gyasumdo, where local residents had secured a monopoly on trans-Himalayan trade (Messerschmidt and N. Gurung 1974, von Furer-Haimendorf 1975). And, even if the Nyishangte had been able to inexpensively obtain large quantities of Tibetan trade goods, there was not an economically feasible route for pack animals to transport them between Nyishang and lowland Nepal. So, while other Himalayan highland groups in Nepal were able to profitably participate in trans-Himalayan trade, the Nyishangte were excluded from this business. Instead, the Nyishangte had to look elsewhere for commercial opportunities in trade.

Thus, it was Nyishang's unfavorable location for trans-Himalayan trade that led its inhabitants to focus instead on trade in the lowlands to the south, an orientation that was to prove enormously beneficial in the 1960s and thereafter as trans-Himalayan trade faltered and trade prospects in South and Southeast Asia grew. If the Nyishangte had resided in an area that provided easy access between Tibet and lowland Nepal, then they would likely have applied themselves to trans-Himalayan trade similar to the way that Nepal's other highland groups located along such travel corridors did. In such a case, they would have had no reason to turn their attention to the distant markets of India and Southeast Asia, and they would not have endeavored to secure and maintain special government privileges enabling their travel to and trade in such areas. They would have suffered the same devastating loss at the sudden curtailment of trans-Himalayan trade in the 1960s as other highland groups, and they would not have been in a position to take advantage of the Nepal government's trade promotion programs or the international market dynamics and regional transportation infrastructure advancements that turned trade between Southeast Asia and Kathmandu into a lucrative business in the

1960s and 1970s. In short, it is very unlikely that the Nyishangte would have emerged as prominent international traders.

Nyishang's geographic location also put its residents in a position to benefit from the geo-political and economic concerns of the Nepal government. Following the formation of the Nepal State in the late 18th century, government authorities in Kathmandu were anxious to establish control over and win the loyalty of groups inhabiting the country's frontier border region with Tibet. Such concerns, together with Nyishang's strategic location between two major trans-Himalayan trade routes of economic importance to Nepal's government, helped the Nyishangte to secure and maintain favorable travel and trade privileges from the government, as will be described later in the section on geo-politics and government-sanctioned privileges.

Going back to ecology for a moment, it should be pointed out that not only did Nyishang's ecological environment encourage involvement in external commercial activity by constraining agro-pastoralism, it also provided the Nyishangte with local products of high value to trade in lowland markets, as well as the free time to engage in that trade. Because of their limited supply and unique characteristics, various natural products found only in the Himalayan highlands were in relatively high demand in the market bazaars of Nepal and India. During the winter, a slack period of reduced labor requirements in Nyishang due to the unfeasibility of agriculture and pastoralism then, Nyishang residents brought down with them from the highlands such easily transported items as the scented glands of male musk deer, snow leopard pelts, yak tails, birch tree bark, and various roots, herbs, and medicinal plants. In exchange for these, rice could be obtained to make up for the shortage of grains in Nyishang.

The lack of a direct travel corridor between Nyishang and Tibet was not only important to the Nyishangte's eventual emergence as prominent international traders, it was also a seminal factor in the group's more recent involvement in tourism. Due to sensitivities over border security with communist China, the Nepal government would not have opened Nyishang to unrestricted trekking tourism if the region were within easy reach of Tibet. If that had been the case, Nyishang would not have developed into one of the more popular trekking destinations in highland Nepal, and Manang village would not have emerged as a community of prominent tourism entrepreneurs. As it turned out, however, Nyishang's location enabled it to become one of only a few areas in Nepal's highland Himalaya where unrestricted trekking

tourism has been allowed. But of course tourists do not visit Nyishang merely because they are allowed to. Most do so because of Nyishang's dramatic scenery, which is a function of the region's proximity to the impressive Annapurna Himal.

The primary reason that members of the Manang community have been so well-positioned to cash in on the commercial opportunities offered by tourism is a matter of control over land. Because of its control of a major portion of the land, including the most strategically located, along the trekking route through Nyishang, the Manang community has been far better situated to take economic advantage of tourism than any other village in the region.

For instance, the development of Manang village itself into the most lucrative tourist market in Nyishang has been aided by its location at an elevation where the first noticeable physiological effects of high altitude generally occur among trekking tourists heading up the Nyishang valley. As a result, nearly every trekking tourist stops to spend two nights or more in Manang to get acclimated to the altitude, eat well, and buy provisions before attempting to cross a high mountain pass beyond the village.

The Manang community also controls all the land on the route between Manang village and the pass, along which most trekkers spend the following two nights as well. Therefore, since most trekkers spend at least four nights in hotels owned by members of the Manang community, they have been able to capture at least four times as much hotel and food service business as the residents of any other Nyishang village, where trekkers might spend a single night, merely pass through, or not visit at all. In addition, the Manang community controls the area in which the region's only airstrip is located, thereby cashing in on the biggest concentration of tourist hotel development in Nyishang other than Manang village itself.

As I have tried to describe, the ecological constraints imposed by poor local economic factors of production encouraged members of the Manang community to look for external economic opportunities to supplement subsistence level agro-pastoralism in their home region. Likewise, the geographical constraints of a boxed-in location away from natural travel corridors between Tibet and lowland Nepal prevented community members from involvement in trans-Himalayan trade and turned their search for trade opportunities elsewhere. But although local ecological and geographical constraints may have played important roles in Manang residents' search for commercial opportunities, these factors alone cannot explain the economic

success ultimately achieved by the community. There are many communities throughout Nepal faced with poor local economic factors of production that are also remote from significant trade routes, but scant few of those communities have emerged as entrepreneurial. A crucial difference has been that the Manang community actually found external commercial opportunities, in the form of exploitable government-sanctioned privileges and market dynamics, and responded to them aggressively and effectively, taking full advantage of the infrastructure advancements of the day, as the following sections will elucidate.

The Role of Geo-Politics and Government-Sanctioned Privileges

The ability of the Nyishangte to conduct trade in lowland Nepal and beyond was helped considerably by changing political circumstances in Nepal during the latter part of the 18th century. Following the conquest and consolidation of some sixty feudal states by the kingdom of Gorkha, the territory that comprises modern Nepal became a country governed for the first time by a powerful central authority, a central authority capable of maintaining peace and making and enforcing regulations throughout the country. This new central authority was also capable of granting special privileges to certain groups, which the government did for reasons suiting its own purposes. From the capital in Kathmandu, the king of this new empire, and in turn his successors, was concerned primarily with three objectives: collecting taxes to amass personal wealth and fund his army, establishing sovereignty over and winning the loyalty and obeisance of the people in newly conquered areas, and maintaining security within the boundaries of the expanding kingdom as well as against foreign powers in neighboring Tibet and India.

The first of these objectives was accomplished through taxing the country's peasantry and the trade of goods from Tibet and India that passed through Nepal. Among Nepal's rural agrarian population, the only things available to tap were labor and agricultural produce, both of which the government and its agents extracted mercilessly throughout the country (Regmi 1972). To collect customs on trade goods, the government set up tax stations along routes of travel into and throughout the country. But with its military forces over-extended fighting battles on the country's far western and eastern frontiers during the latter 18th century, the government in Kathmandu was not in a position to actively enforce its policies in remote, difficult to access, Himalayan highland areas such as Nyishang. As a result,

in exchange for pledged loyalty and nominal tax payments, the Nepal government allowed local autonomy to prevail in its far-flung highland territories along the Tibetan border (Stiller 1973, Ramble 1997:396-397). Thus, while heavy taxes and compulsory unpaid labor obligations were extracted from peasants throughout most of Nepal, the Nyishangte paid only a nominal, symbolic annual tribute to the government in Kathmandu (Regmi 1972:35, 116).

The Kathmandu government's second objective, that of winning the loyalty of people in newly conquered areas, was accomplished by not plundering or persecuting them and by honoring their previously existing customs and traditions. As a result, local arrangements that had been in place under the prior rulers were allowed to continue as the territories that comprised the new kingdom of Nepal were consolidated under Gorkha rule (Stiller 1973, Regmi 1984:149-150). In the case of the Nyishangte, this meant that the local travel and trade privileges they had been able to obtain previously from the ruler of Lamjung were recognized and perpetuated by the government of Nepal following the defeat of Lamjung by the Gorkha army in 1784 (N. Gurung 1977:223, Cooke 1985a:308).⁸

The government's third objective of maintaining security throughout the country was accomplished by strictly controlling travel within Nepal as well as trade across the country's border with British India. For nearly two hundred years, a series of isolationist, security-obsessed rulers placed tight restrictions on travel and trade in Nepal, even by the country's own citizens (Stiller 1976; Regmi 1984:11-12, 118-120). Until these restrictions were lifted in the 1950s, official government papers were needed to travel throughout the country (Hagen 1961). But because the Nepal government recognized the previous travel and trade privileges bestowed upon the group by the ruler of Lamjung, the Nyishangte were able to move freely not just through the region of Lamjung, but throughout the whole of the territory comprising the newly consolidated kingdom of Nepal.

The special travel and trade privileges granted to the Nyishangte were documented in a royal decree issued by Nepal's king in 1789 (N. Gurung 1976:299). That this declaration of privileges coincided with Nepal's 1788-1792 war with Tibet suggests that the privileges may have been extended by Nepal's king in exchange for the group's allegiance and support in the war. During periods of conflict between Nepal and Tibet, the Nepal government badly needed the cooperation and loyalty of groups such as the Nyishangte along Nepal's northern frontier border with Tibet.⁹ From the government's

perspective, the privileges given to the Nyishangte were probably seen as a miniscule price to pay for the goodwill and loyalty of a frontier group whose regular winter migration and small scale barter trade hardly merited the bother of trying to control and tax. From the perspective of the Nyishangte, on the other hand, the group's travel privileges and exemption from paying customs taxes on trade goods were very significant. Unlike other groups in Nepal, the Nyishangte were able to travel freely throughout the country and did not have to forfeit their small, hard-earned trading gains at the government tax stations they encountered along the way.

Over the course of the following nearly two centuries, the Nyishangte were able to maintain their travel privileges and customs exemption via periodic petitions to the government in Kathmandu, which held little sway over the remote frontier region but wished to maintain its allegiance for security purposes. As justification for its requests, the Nyishangte community cited in its petitions to the government the food deficit in Nyishang due to poor local agricultural conditions and the historical precedent of travel and trade privileges previously granted to them by the government. Documented renewals of the Nyishangte's privileges include royal decrees issued in 1802, 1825, 1844, 1857, 1883, 1905, 1933, 1964, 1966, and 1972.¹⁰ Generally, these decrees recognized and perpetuated the rights that the Nyishangte had been granted previously, requested that they continue following traditional rules, and confirmed that they were allowed to travel and trade throughout Nepal without restriction and without paying any customs taxes as long as they paid a nominal annual tribute to the Nepal government.

Although unique in nature, the Nepal government's granting of special trade privileges to the Nyishangte was not an exceptional occurrence. As pointed out earlier in this article, the government granted trade monopolies to a number of groups. What was exceptional about the Nyishangte's receipt of special trade privileges was the group's success in maintaining those privileges even through periods of major change in Nepal's government. It is nothing less than remarkable that the Nyishangte were able to keep their privileges intact, and even expand them, during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries despite shifts in political power from Lamjung to Kathmandu and then from Nepal's royal family to the Rana regime and back to the royal family.

In 1846, Nepal's monarchy was reduced to figurehead status after a political coup in which a military general, Jung Bahadur Rana, seized power by means of a bloody massacre of more than thirty leading members of the

government. Under the Rana regime, government administration in Nepal was centralized and standardized through the compilation of Nepal's first comprehensive written legal code, the *Muluki Ain* ("Law of the Land" – Nepali), in 1854. The legal code documented as law the various rights of particular groups, generally affording special advantages to groups enjoying high status in the eyes of Nepal's ruling Hindu elite (Stiller 1993). Despite their low status as a Tibetan Buddhist culture group in Nepal's Hindu-centric caste hierarchy, the Nyishangte were successful in getting their travel and trade privileges included in the national legal code.

That the timing of this coincided with Nepal's 1854-1856 war with Tibet suggests that the inclusion of the Nyishangte's privileges in the legal code, similar to the royal decree of 1789, may have been done in exchange for Nyishangte allegiance and support in wartime, and as an incentive to keep the Nyishangte loyal to Kathmandu following the war. Among the Nepal government's objectives in waging the war of 1854-1856 with Tibet was to control, and thus be able to tax, the major trans-Himalayan trade route along the Kali Gandaki valley in the Mustang region adjacent to Nyishang. As pointed out by Manzardo and Sharma (1975:26), in the mind of the Nepal government, "the local Bhotias¹¹ were felt to be untrustworthy since they still had split loyalties [to both Nepal and Tibet]." Thus, the monopoly on collecting customs taxes along the Kali Gandaki trade route that the Nepal government granted to certain Thakali merchants "had a dual purpose: to regulate and control customs on northern trade, and to secure the allegiance of the northern border peoples" (ibid.). It is not unreasonable to surmise that the Nepal government's extension of the Nyishangte's own trade privileges during this period also was done in order to secure Nyishangte loyalties to Nepal. The importance of the Nyishangte's allegiance to the government in Kathmandu becomes obvious when one considers Nyishang's strategic location between and adjacent to two major trans-Himalayan trade routes through the Mustang and Gyasumdo regions.

The Nyishangte were no less successful in maintaining their special travel and trade privileges through periods of significant change in Nepal's government during the mid 20th century. The government of Nepal underwent drastic overhauls in 1950, when the royal family was restored to power and a new constitution created, and again in 1960, when a political coup by the king led to the dissolution of the country's parliament and vested sweeping powers in the monarchy. Again, as this was a time of considerable worry on the part of Nepal's government about securing its northern border

regions against communist China following the occupation of Tibet, it also seems reasonable to surmise that the government may have had ulterior strategic motives in extending the Nyishangte's privileges. That the Nepal government allowed those privileges to expire shortly after relations with communist China stabilized and the threat of Chinese aggression along the Nepal-Tibet border diminished in the mid 1970s adds even more credence to this idea.¹²

By the late 19th century, the Nyishangte had pushed beyond the Nepal border and were bartering goods in the market centers of northern India. The Nyishangte's ability to travel and trade beyond Nepal's border was facilitated by the Nepal government's expansion of the group's special privileges to include travel and trade outside of Nepal as well. This expansion of the Nyishangte's special privileges was critical to the initiation of their involvement in international trade during this time. According to Nepali historian Krishna Kant Adhikari (1975:189-190), during the latter half of the 19th century

Nepali subjects were prevented by the Nepalese government from crossing into Indian territory to sell [trade goods].

In order to bring the entire Naya Mulak [land along the Indian border¹³] under cultivation [and thereby increase the Nepal government's land tax revenues], the Nepalese government induced and encouraged Indian subjects to settle in the new territory. With a view to populating the [Naya Mulak], the Nepalese government forbade its subjects to visit India to sell their goods.

To compel Nepalese traders to sell their goods in the Nepalese markets, the government imposed a heavy duty on articles for export. A levy of [six percent] was imposed on all valuable articles, livestock, and other goods, besides a tax called chungli. In addition, an export or transit duty called Mahsuli Nikasi was levied on goods exported to India. The result of this policy created hardship for Nepalese traders who used to sell hill products in the Indian markets freely.

Thus, at a time when the Nepal government prohibited its subjects from crossing the border to trade in India and charged high taxes on exports, the

Nyishangte were allowed to travel and trade freely in India and were exempted from paying customs taxes on exported as well as imported items.

But arguably the greatest advantage for Nyishangte traders came with the Nepal government's exclusive grant of passports to the group. That the Nyishangte were granted passports in the 1960s, years ahead of other ethnic groups in the country, is widely known in Nepal, and many people have casually attributed the group's success in international trade to this particular development. However, the reasons behind the passport grant have not been well understood, a situation that has added significantly to the group's enigma. But as the following paragraphs reveal, the passport grant, similar to the previous grants of travel and trade privileges to the group, can be explained by the government's own geo-political concerns.

Following India's independence from Britain in 1947 and communist China's military invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950, the tiny country of Nepal suddenly found itself in a vulnerable position sandwiched between two antagonistic regional super-powers. Following a political revolution supported by the Indian government, Nepal's King Tribhuvan Shah, whose family had been relegated to figurehead status by the ruling Rana regime since 1846, was able to regain political power in 1950. Under the isolationist Ranas, Nepal had been effectively sealed off from the rest of the world for more than a century. But King Tribhuvan realized that, given the changing geo-politics in South and Central Asia, Nepal's continued independence would require a more open policy toward the West and careful attention to relations with its two immediate neighbors (Rose 1971). Therefore, fearing the expansionist ambitions of communist China, Nepal's longstanding isolationist policy was relaxed, and the country cautiously embarked on a process of democratization and development under the assistance and influence of international donor aid. As part of this process, the central government in Kathmandu initiated a nationwide program to integrate its remote, Tibetan-frontier border areas with the rest of the country in the name of nation-building, socio-economic development, and national security.

Tribhuvan's son and successor, King Mahendra, was especially reliant upon political support from India following a controversial 1960 political coup in which he dissolved Nepal's democratically-elected parliament, banned political parties, jailed opposition leaders, and effectively took over sole control of the government (Rose 1963, Burghart 1994). The tense border war between China and India in 1962 intensified the king's concern with securing Nepal's northern frontier border areas. To forward the objectives of

national security and border containment, the king was especially concerned with winning the allegiance of and consolidating control over the Tibetan culture groups inhabiting Nepal's frontier border zone with Tibet. Thus, due to the critical importance of security along the frontier border together with his domestic political vulnerability and reliance upon India for political support, King Mahendra could not afford to overlook a conflict that had occurred in 1961 between Manang villagers and an Indian military expedition climbing a mountain near the village (for an account of the conflict see Kohli 1962).

In the early 1960s, the king embarked on a program of visiting remote areas of Nepal by helicopter as part of a public relations campaign primarily aimed at winning the loyalty and political support of the country's majority rural population in order to balance urban opposition to his autocratic rule. In addition to building grassroots public support, these so-called "Tour Commissions" were intended to appease international aid donors by providing information on local socio-economic conditions and needs and thereby facilitate the government's receipt of international funding for development projects in particularly impoverished areas of the country (Rose 1963).

Ostensibly as part of this program, but undoubtedly with the conflict that had occurred with the Indian military climbing expedition in mind and with an aim to bring a notorious frontier group into the fold of the government's influence, the king visited Nyishang. Following the king's visit, the group's international travel privileges and customs exemption were renewed, and the residents of Nyishang were issued Nepali passports. The Nyishangte thus became the only group in Nepal at the time with access to passports besides those available to government officials, students studying abroad, and Gurkha soldiers in foreign service (see N. Gurung 1976:300, Cooke 1985a:129).

Although the Nyishangte had long been involved in small scale, seasonal international trade, the exclusive passport grant was the watershed event that led to the group's emergence as prominent trade entrepreneurs. The availability of Nepali passports obviated the need to pay bribes to Indian customs officials to obtain Indian passports for traveling to foreign countries, a practice that by the 1950s had grown prohibitively expensive for many Nyishangte traders (Snellgrove 1961:209). With free Nepali passports, travel beyond India was an easier proposition. Furthermore, the exclusivity of the

passport grant meant the Nyishangte had limited competition from other Nepalis in the type of trade they pursued.

With passports facilitating their widespread travel abroad, Nyishangte traders were especially well positioned to take advantage of a number of international trade promotion programs instituted by the Nepal government in the 1960s. While the government's trade promotion programs were officially aimed at boosting the country's level of export trade, they were also used to circumvent government restrictions on imports (van Spengen 1987:209-211, H. Gurung 1980:227-228). For the Nyishangte, this was made even easier by the special concession the group was given to exceed normal government restrictions on imports (Cooke 1985a:79, 130; Zivetz 1992:122). The group's special concession on duty-free import limits gave them a big advantage over other traders since goods imported to Nepal were generally subject to heavy customs taxes. For example, during the heyday of Nyishangte trade in luxury consumer goods in the 1970s, customs duties on consumer electronics imported to Nepal from Southeast Asia were equal to 110 percent of the goods' value (Schrader 1988:348).

Thus, with easily obtained passports, liberal import limits, an exemption from customs taxes, and little competition, the entire group was motivated to avail itself of the commercial opportunities offered by international trade and to take full advantage of the market dynamics and infrastructure advancements (described below) that made trade between Nepal and Southeast Asia increasingly lucrative during this period.

As with trade, geo-politics and government-sanctioned privileges also played a vital role in the availability of the Nyishangte's commercial opportunities in tourism. Under pressure from international aid agencies to improve Nepal's balance of payments for international trade by increasing foreign exchange earnings, the Nepal government began efforts in the 1970s to develop and promote international tourism in the country (Satyal 1999, Banskota and Sharma 1995, Richter 1989). To accomplish this, the government provided investment incentives, tax breaks, and loans to the private sector to expand the country's nascent tourism infrastructure, and the number of hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies grew rapidly in Kathmandu. Under the Nepal government's 1975-1980 fiscal plan, emphasis was placed on expanding tourism to areas outside of Kathmandu by developing and promoting trekking tourism. The scenic and cultural uniqueness and opportunities for adventure offered by the Himalaya mountains provided a strong attraction for foreign visitors, but to promote

mountain tourism the Nepal government needed to open up areas in the Himalayan highlands that had long been restricted to foreigners due to border sensitivities with China.

Nyishang had been kept off limits to foreign visitors primarily due to the regional presence of armed Tibetan freedom fighters involved in resisting the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The *Khampa*, as these freedom fighters were popularly called, received clandestine support from the United States and operated from camps on the Nepal side of the border from where they conducted raids against Chinese forces in Tibet. Three of these camps were in areas immediately adjacent to Nyishang. With the improvement of political relations between the United States and China in the early 1970s, U.S. support of the *Khampa* rebels came to an end, and in 1975 the Nepal army was able to remove all the rebel camps from Nepal's highland areas, including those adjacent to Nyishang.¹⁴ As a result, not long after the Nepal government allowed the Nyishangte's special customs tax exemption to expire in 1976,¹⁵ the Nyishangte were provided with a new commercial opportunity. The very next year, 1977, the Nepal government opened the Nyishang region to trekking tourism.

The Role of Market Dynamics

During the early and mid 20th century, Nyishangte trade activities spread through India's northeast frontier region and from there overland to Burma and Southeast Asia. As Nyishangte trade expanded geographically, the nature of the goods exchanged also changed. No longer were their trade activities comprised merely of bartering products from the mountains for food grains from the Nepal hills. Instead, the goods they traded reflected the markets they encountered and the varying demand for items that could be obtained cheaply in one area and sold for a profit in another. For example, during the course of a mid 20th century itinerant trade venture abroad, a Nyishangte trader might purchase inexpensive jewelry in India, sell it in Burma and obtain semi-precious stones, sell those in Thailand and obtain silk cloth and ready-made clothes, return to Nepal and sell those, and then finally return to Nyishang with domestic goods and food grains acquired with accumulated trade earnings. If there was one thing that characterized successful Nyishangte traders, it was adaptability to market dynamics. As market conditions changed in the various regions they visited, so did the types of goods they traded and the itineraries they followed.

In the 1960s, armed conflicts in Vietnam, Laos, and northern Thailand resulted in situations of local scarcity that created profitable conditions for opportunistic businessmen in these regions, including some traders from Nyishang (van Spengen 1987:216-220). During the height of United States military involvement in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nyishangte trade business thrived by selling Nepali and Thai curios as well as inexpensive gemstones from Malaysia to U.S. military personnel in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Saigon.¹⁶ Furthermore, as Thailand grew in popularity as an international tourism destination during the 1970s, Nyishangte traders also sold souvenirs to tourists on Thai beaches.

Low trade restrictions and economic growth in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong provided the Nyishangte with a robust business environment for their trade ventures. Many Nyishangte traders set up mobile sidewalk displays and peddled Buddhist curios in night-time street markets of Bangkok, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hong Kong, and other market centers of Southeast Asia. In Singapore and Hong Kong, Chinese pharmacies were willing to pay high prices for musk deer glands and medicinal plants peddled by the Nyishangte. The extraordinarily high returns realized on these items by Nyishangte traders, as much as a hundred times more than they had been able to earn from Chinese traders in Calcutta during the 1950s, dramatically raised the profitability of Nyishangte trade ventures (Cooke 1985a:76, 1985b:48, 1986:74).

The profitability of Nyishangte trade in Southeast Asia enabled traders to begin purchasing high-priced luxury consumer goods such as watches, cameras, stereos, and televisions in the duty-free markets of Singapore and Hong Kong for export to Nepal and India. With the benefit of the liberal import limits they were allowed and their exemption from paying customs taxes, Nyishangte traders were able to very profitably import such items into Nepal for sale in its restricted domestic market, which became all the more lucrative as Kathmandu emerged as an important transit point for the Indian black market.

The trade and transit treaties Nepal entered into with India in 1960 and 1963 allowed Nepali traders to transport foreign imports duty-free through India to Nepal. This provided an incentive to Nepali traders to import luxury consumer goods to India from free-trade ports in Southeast Asia. Because India's government had adopted strict import regulations and high protective import tariffs under international donor influenced import substitution industrialization policies, smuggling restricted goods onto the Indian market

became a highly profitable venture, and one that Nyishangte traders were quick to capitalize on.

The profitability of smuggling high-priced luxury consumer goods into India and the ease with which Kathmandu airport customs officials could be bribed (Cooke 1985a:96-97, Schrader 1988:210-213) led to the rise of Kathmandu as a major black market trade entrepot for transporting such goods from Southeast Asia to India. The black market for gold was especially lucrative, and following the legalization of the gold trade in Hong Kong in the mid 1970s and the initiation of direct air service between Kathmandu and Hong Kong in 1977, the fantastic profits that could be made by smuggling gold from Hong Kong to Kathmandu attracted some highly capitalized Nyishangte traders willing to take the risks associated with engaging in illicit business (Cooke 1985a:88-90, van Spengen 1987:220).

So far, this section has described how market dynamics in South and Southeast Asia in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s provided commercial opportunities to Nyishangte traders. But changing market circumstances have not always favored the Nyishangte. During the early and mid 1990s, commercial opportunities for many small and medium scale Nyishangte traders declined significantly for several reasons.

For Nepali passport holders, traveling to Southeast Asia became much more difficult during the 1990s, as governments throughout the region adopted stricter immigration policies aimed at curbing visa abuses that had been especially rampant among Nepalis due to the frequency with which they illegally overstayed visas in order to earn wages and send cash remittances to their families back home. For visiting most countries in Southeast Asia, instead of receiving an automatic visa upon arrival as they had been accustomed to previously, Nyishangte traders, along with other Nepalis, had to apply for visas at consulates in Kathmandu and go through a screening process. Typically, only well-established business people, who had foreign partners to vouch for them, who could document high levels of legitimate export business, or whose passports contained a large number of previous entry and exit stamps proving they had not overstayed visas in the past, were able to obtain visas.

Visa policies in Hong Kong, which since the 1980s had served as the primary market for many Nyishangte traders, became particularly strict after the territory was turned over to China in 1997. The Chinese implemented rigid immigration rules that precluded many Nyishangte traders from being able to travel to and do business in Hong Kong. Nyishangte traders had

previously been able to receive visas on arrival in Hong Kong, but under the new rules, Nepali citizens could not obtain a visa unless explicitly sponsored by a Hong Kong resident.

In addition to the increased difficulty of obtaining visas to travel to Southeast Asia, the length of visas became unpredictable and of too short a duration, typically just one or two weeks compared to one or two months previously, to be of use to small scale street vendors who needed time to hawk enough goods to recoup the cost of their airfare to and from Kathmandu. A one or two-week visa was only sufficient for large scale traders who could conduct their business quickly through established foreign business partners.

Even in cases where Nyishangte traders could obtain visas, increased police enforcement in the 1990s against unlicensed street vending in Southeast Asian cities severely hampered traditional Nyishangte trade practices. Since foreigners with tourist visas were not given licenses for street vending, only well-capitalized Nyishangte with established retail shops in Southeast Asia could continue their trade businesses at prior levels of profitability. Other traders were forced to sell their goods at wholesale prices to shops for considerably lower margins than they had been previously able to achieve themselves as low overhead retail vendors.

The crackdown on unlicensed street vendors by police in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hong Kong, and other Southeast Asian cities not only made it very difficult for Nyishangte traders to profitably sell their wares, it also sometimes resulted in huge losses when a trader's entire stock was confiscated by the police. While pursuing street trade in Southeast Asia during the early and mid 1990s, many Nyishangte were arrested by the police, their trade goods confiscated, and, after serving time in jail, were deported and banned from re-entering the country.¹⁷

Southeast Asia was not the only place where increased law enforcement in the 1990s hampered Nyishangte trade. Due to pressure from foreign governments and domestic reforms following the creation of Nepal's new democratic constitution in 1991, Nepali government officials began cracking down on smuggling. The closer attention paid to enforcing import policies increased the hassle of going through customs at Kathmandu's international airport, particularly for Nyishangte traders due to their widespread reputation for being involved in illicit trade. Many Nyishangte traders found it necessary to pay higher and higher bribes to corrupt officials to prevent their goods from being held up in customs for lengthy periods. Thus, not only did the risk

associated with smuggling increase, the cost and anxiety of engaging in legitimate import businesses also rose.

Import businesses were also plagued with decreasing prices in Kathmandu for imported goods following the liberalization of India's formerly strict import policies. With the opening up of the Indian market for imported luxury consumer goods, demand dropped in Kathmandu for goods formerly smuggled into India from Nepal or sold to Indian tourists on shopping sprees in Kathmandu. The prices that could be attained in Kathmandu for luxury consumer goods were driven down by the fact that, after Indian trade liberalization, Indian businessmen could import goods from Southeast Asia directly to India at lower cost than they could be imported to India through Nepal. As prices plunged in Kathmandu, so did the profitability of Nyishangte trade businesses importing luxury consumer goods from Hong Kong and Singapore (Cooke 1985a:93-94). And Indian businessmen were not the only competition that Nyishangte traders had to deal with. According to Nyishangte informants, the number of Chinese, Thai, Malay, Burmese, and Pakistani traders doing business in Southeast Asian markets increased considerably in the 1990s.

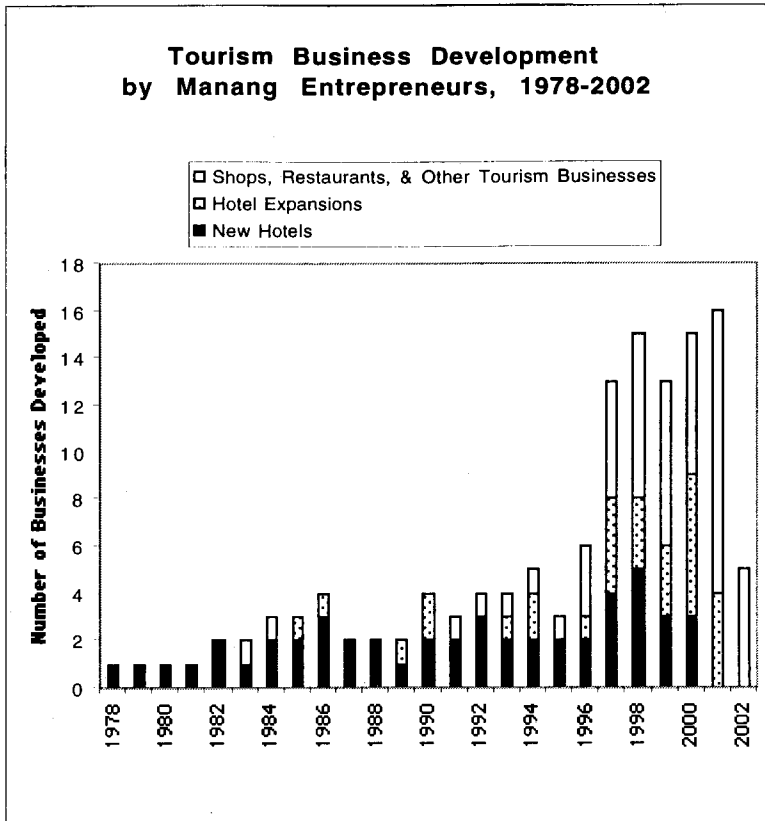
Nyishangte trade businesses were dealt yet another blow by the devaluation of Nepal's currency under International Monetary Fund stabilization and World Bank structural adjustment programs in the latter part of the 1980s. Although the programs succeeded to a certain degree in increasing Nepal's commercial agricultural and industrial output and reducing its trade deficit, the devaluation of Nepal's currency made it more expensive in foreign exchange terms for Nyishangte traders to purchase foreign trade goods and to pay for international air travel and living costs abroad. And if all the problems outlined above were not discouraging enough, the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, which wracked national economies and stifled business activity in Southeast Asia, added further to the woes of Nyishangte traders doing business there.

At the same time that their trade businesses in Southeast Asia were falling off, Nyishangte traders faced increased business competition in Kathmandu from highly capitalized and well educated Newar, Indian, Marwari, Tibetan, Thakali, and Sherpa entrepreneurs. Increased competition was particularly acute in the Thamel retail area of Kathmandu, where many Nyishangte business owners were renting shop space. The marked rise in competition during the 1990s drove Thamel shop rents to double between 1992 and 1997.

As the changing international trade and Kathmandu retail markets soured the business prospects of small and medium scale Nyishangte entrepreneurs in the 1990s, some of them turned their attention instead toward the tourism market in Nyishang, where annual tourist numbers had been growing steadily since the late 1980s.¹⁸ Because of the previously described locational advantages enjoyed by the Manang community, entrepreneurs from Manang village were much more aggressive than those from other Nyishang villages in starting up and investing capital in local tourism businesses. And the higher degree of business activity in Manang had a snowballing effect as entrepreneurial community members plowed their earnings back into additional tourism business development, which in turn attracted more tourists to Manang and enabled entrepreneurs to earn even higher returns. The dramatic increase in tourism business development by the Manang community in the latter 1990s is evident in the following chart.

With the simultaneous decline of trade opportunities abroad and in Kathmandu and the growth of tourism business opportunities in Manang, more than thirty Nyishangte families who had earlier migrated to Kathmandu moved back to Manang during the 1990s in order to start tourism businesses there. Even large scale Nyishangte entrepreneurs who remained in Kathmandu found opportunities to participate indirectly in the tourism boom by helping in some cases to finance the development of tourism businesses in Nyishang, a topic that receives more attention later in this article.

Of course, in this section on the role played by market dynamics in the availability of commercial opportunities, I would be remiss not to point out that Manang's tourism market is a part of, and to a large degree dependent upon, the larger Nepal tourism market, which in turn is a part of and dependent upon the overall international tourism market. As such, much of the credit for the steady growth rate of tourist numbers in Manang during the 1990s can be attributed to the similarly steady growth rate of tourist numbers in Nepal during the same time frame.¹⁹ Similarly, the recent decline in the number of tourists visiting Manang can be attributed to the dramatic decline of tourism in Nepal due to the increased violence of a Maoist insurgency in the country since November 2001 as well as to the overarching decline in international travel throughout the world in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.



The Role of Infrastructure Development

The geographic expansion of Nyishangte trade ventures throughout South and Southeast Asia was made possible by the development of regional transportation networks and markets under British colonial rule of India, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Utilizing railroad networks within India and Burma and steamship routes linking Calcutta with ports in Southeast Asia, Nyishangte traders ventured farther and farther afield, learning about, becoming familiar with, and taking advantage of commercial opportunities in regions previously unknown to them.

Similarly, the upgrade and expansion of Kathmandu's airport under international development aid enabled large jets used for international flights to land in and take-off from Nepal's capital. The initiation of direct jet airline service linking Kathmandu with Bangkok in 1968 and Hong Kong in 1977

was critical to the vibrant growth of Nyishangte trade in Southeast Asia. Using these cities as transportation hubs, it was easy for Nyishangte traders to reach other market areas in Southeast Asia by plane, train, or bus. Direct flights also greatly facilitated Nyishangte traders' ability to import goods cheaply and easily from Southeast Asia to Kathmandu. The improvements to Kathmandu's airport and the air service agreements entered into between the Nepal government and a number of international air carriers also provided foreign tourists with quicker and easier access to Nepal, a factor that was instrumental to the country's increased popularity as an international travel destination.

Other transportation infrastructure advancements also played important roles in the growth of tourism business opportunities in Manang. Under the Nepal government's "Remote Areas Development Program," which was supported by international aid donors to counter the threat of communist Chinese influence in remote frontier areas near the Tibetan border (H. Gurung 1997:515), funds were dispersed in remote highland areas of Nepal such as Nyishang for infrastructure development. As part of this program, the difficult and hazardous trail leading up through the Marsyandi River gorge to Manang was improved in 1968 to facilitate the integration of the isolated Nyishang region with the rest of Nepal. The improved trail not only facilitated government officials' and development workers' access to Nyishang but also enabled the transport by pack mules of externally produced food items (e.g. rice, processed flour, sugar, and salt) to Nyishang, thereby greatly increasing local residents' economic ties to and dependence upon lowland Nepal. The trail was further improved in 1977 to enable safer passage for trekking tourists and for the pack animals that have been instrumental in transporting up to Manang the large quantities of food items required by the local tourism service economy.

The Nepal government also funded the clearing of a dirt airstrip near Manang in the early 1980s that made possible the transport of people and cargo via small airplanes. Although some tourists utilize this airstrip to reach Nyishang, the majority spend about a week walking up from a trailhead off of the road that has linked Kathmandu and Pokhara since 1968. The extension of a spur road to Besishahar in the 1990s has further increased the popularity of the trek to Manang by circumventing three days of walking through hot lowland jungle. In addition to expanding transportation infrastructure, it should also be mentioned that the Nepal government encouraged, through tax

breaks and loans, the development of hotels and restaurants in Kathmandu and Pokhara to boost the country's overall capacity for hosting tourists.

Nexus of Commercial Opportunity and Economic Cooperation

As the preceding sections have demonstrated, historical circumstances resulting from the geographic location and ecological environment of the Nyishang valley, the Nepal government's geo-politically and economically motivated granting of privileges to the Nyishange, market dynamics, and infrastructure advancements have all played important roles in the opening up and expanding of commercial opportunities in international trade and tourism for the Manang community. In many ways, the Manang community has been fortunate in the sense of having had access to commercial opportunities that opened the door to entrepreneurship by providing sufficient economic incentives for community members to invest the capital, time, and energy and take the risks required to pursue business ventures.

But while the importance of commercial opportunities to the Manang community's economic success cannot be denied, it was the community's opportunistic exploitation of those opportunities that turned them into actual means for achieving financial gain. In other words, although the availability of commercial opportunity has been an important precursor to the emergence of entrepreneurial activity within the Manang community, it was the ways in which the community responded and adapted to those opportunities that actually drove the widespread development of entrepreneurship in Manang. In its efforts to make the most of its circumstances, the community adapted itself to the pursuit of the different commercial opportunities that became available to its members over time. Thus, although commercial opportunities became available to the people of Manang as a result of geographical attributes and external political and economic forces largely outside of their control, the local cultural characteristics, social systems, and regulatory policies critical to community members' widespread involvement in entrepreneurial ventures were internal manifestations of the community's response and adaptation to those opportunities.

It is important to point out that this article is not about entrepreneurial activity merely by certain individuals within a community; it is about entrepreneurial activity that is widespread among an entire community. For entrepreneurial activity to become widespread in a community, the factors necessary for entrepreneurial activity must be widely available to the

community's members. The entire community, or at least a large portion of it, must have access to commercial opportunities and capital and have the right to own business assets and the freedom to engage and compete in business ventures. In general, the commercial opportunities available to the Manang community in both trade and tourism were open to virtually all members of the community. And since a large portion of the community had ample time to devote to business – particularly men since they are typically free from most agricultural work in Manang – the primary limiting factors to participation in entrepreneurial ventures were an individual's propensity for engaging in business, willingness to take risk, access to capital, and, in the case of tourism, access to strategically located land. These limiting factors could have prevented many from engaging in entrepreneurial activity had it not been for the Manang community's entrepreneurial culture, social systems of economic cooperation, and free market oriented regulation of private enterprise that effectively served to diminish these limiting factors and thereby remove constraints on entrepreneurship. Therefore, it was really the *interplay* of commercial opportunities, cultural characteristics, social systems, and regulatory policies that drove the remarkable entrepreneurial expansions the Manang community experienced in the 1960s and 1990s.

While a combination of various factors has been responsible for the Manang community's overall economic success, none of these factors has played a more powerful role than local social systems of economic cooperation in facilitating the involvement of large numbers of the community's members in entrepreneurial ventures. The Manang community's social systems of economic cooperation have served to attract, pool, and make accessible throughout the community the capital needed to finance the start-up, execution, and expansion of business ventures. To be sure, these social systems of economic cooperation have played a critical role in enabling the community's members to take advantage of the community's favorable combination of commercial opportunities, entrepreneurial culture, and freedom from business-hindering regulatory restrictions and economic expropriation. If commercial opportunities, an entrepreneurial culture, and economic freedom have been the raw materials of entrepreneurial activity in Manang, the community's social systems of economic cooperation have been the all-important catalyst that provided its members the capital needed to engage and succeed in business ventures.

Its members' extensive use of multiple social systems of economic cooperation in financing business ventures has distinguished the Manang

community from many other communities in highland Nepal, and even in recent years from other village communities within Nyishang. So, while its entrepreneurial culture and regulation of private enterprise have also been important to the Manang community's economic success, the focus of the remainder of this article will be confined to the social systems of economic cooperation used to access capital to finance business ventures. But before embarking on a description of these cooperative systems, it first makes sense to ask why they have developed to a greater degree in Manang than in many other communities of highland Nepal. For this, we must again consider the historical effects of geographical location and ecological environment in Manang.

The Ecological Basis for Cooperation in Manang

Although the same cannot be said for those who gave up village life and migrated to Kathmandu, the relatively recent rise in scale and profitability of business ventures has done little to change the importance of agriculture for Manang residents. One should keep in mind that the Manang community's involvement in trade dates back hundreds of years, and during all that time Manang residents remained heavily dependent upon agriculture for their survival. Indeed, until the emergence of significant commercial opportunities in international trade in recent decades, trade served as merely a supplemental activity to Manang residents' primary occupation as agro-pastoralists. But despite cash income from business activities, the entire Manang community has continued to cultivate crops and keep livestock as sources of fertilizer for their fields. Even the wealthiest of business owners in Manang continue to grow the majority of their own food.

Manang village is located on the sun-exposed northern side of the Nyishang valley on a broad terrace created by glacial erosion, which provides a relatively large flat area for fields of potato, wheat, and buckwheat varieties suitable for high altitude cultivation. Stepped terraces have been cut into the gradually inclined slopes above and below the village to accommodate crop fields as well. Even before the massive out-migration of local residents to Kathmandu in the 1970s and 1980s, labor shortages during periods of peak demand for labor hampered agricultural production, and Manang villagers relied upon hired laborers from neighboring regions to help with the harvest (Ramble 1997:395). Due to Manang's arid climate, however, it is the

availability of adequate irrigation water rather than labor or suitable land that primarily limits the extent of cultivation possible.

As a result of its location in the rain shadow of the Annapurna Himal, Manang receives considerably less precipitation during the summer growing season than most other areas in Nepal's Himalayan highlands. Several small streams fed by snowmelt from mountain peaks high above the village provide a limited supply of irrigation water during the summer. To get water to each individual field near the village, an intricate system of irrigation canals has been constructed and carefully maintained. As irrigation technology in Manang stops at the level of the gravity-fed canal and hand-held hoe, the time-intensive manual watering of fields keeps local residents in their fields at all hours of the night during the summer in order to fully utilize the limited supply of irrigation water. Even though half the population now lives in Kathmandu and an additional source of irrigation water has been engineered with government development funds, irrigation water is still considered inadequate to meet local demand. The reliance on irrigation must have been even greater several decades ago before massive out-migration left some fields uncultivated, rising incomes enabled the purchase of imported foodstuffs, and a UN-sponsored Nepal government program began providing rice at a subsidized price to the residents of remote areas of the country such as Nyishang.

Historically, the absolute dependence on irrigation for survival in Manang would have served as a powerful motivator to develop systems of mutual cooperation in Manang society. Such large scale undertakings as the building and periodic maintenance of numerous irrigation canals required the cooperative effort of the entire community. And the entire population's need to use those irrigation canals required the community to develop and utilize cooperative systems of shared use among its members.

In Manang today, cooperation between all village households remains critical for the repair of communal irrigation canals and the allocation of irrigation water to private crop fields. Nine separate irrigation canals supply water to the crop fields of Manang and its nearby subsidiary settlement of Tenki, with the group of fields served by each canal forming a separate crop field area. The irrigation canals must be repaired each spring, and when repair work for a particular canal is being conducted every household owning a field in the area fed by that canal has to send one member to participate or else pay a fine to the village government of 500 rupees per day.²⁰

Prior to the start of the irrigation season each year, owners of crop fields in each irrigation area form themselves into groups, referred to as *chhopa* (Nyishangte), comprised of typically five or six households. The number of households owning crop fields in each of the nine irrigation areas ranges from fifty to eighty. If, for example, sixty households own crop fields in one irrigation area, then those households might organize themselves into ten *chhopa* groups of six members each. Each of the ten *chhopa* groups would take its turn day-by-day using the irrigation water, so that each household owning crop fields in the irrigation area would get to irrigate its crop fields once every ten days. At the time of *chhopa* group formation, representatives from the various groups draw numbers in a lottery to determine the order in which the groups will get to access the irrigation water in that area.

On the day of a given *chhopa* group's turn, the households that comprise the group decide among themselves the order of using the irrigation water that day. Using the irrigation water involves diverting water through a series of canals leading to the household's crop fields and then distributing the water over each field. When one household finishes irrigating its crop fields, typically after two to three hours depending on the number and size of the fields and the flow rate of the water, another household in the *chhopa* group diverts the water to its fields, and so on. When all of the households in that day's designated *chhopa* group are finished irrigating their fields, other households with fields in the area may divert the water to their own fields on an ad hoc basis. Since there are no guards charged with the duty of controlling the use of irrigation canals, the complexity and the self-regulatory nature of irrigation in Manang requires everyone's mutual cooperation. Despite occasional misunderstandings during periods when canals are open to ad hoc use, the system works quite well.

There are other examples as well of traditional systems of cooperation among members of the Manang community that continue to be effectively utilized in Manang today. One particularly powerful example is the *tosum* (Nyishangte) system. The responsibility for regulating livestock in Manang was traditionally delegated by the village council (*khamba* – Nyishangte), and today is still delegated by the village government (*gaabisa* – Nepali), to a committee of crop field guardians referred to as *tosum*. The purpose of the *tosum* system is to guard crop fields from damage by livestock during the summer agricultural season. A group of eight men, six from Manang village and two from Manang's nearby subsidiary settlement of Tenki, are selected each year to serve as *tosum* guardians for the crop fields in the Manang-Tenki

vicinity. The eight men, all married and all from different households, are selected in a rotating fashion from the pool of households owning crop fields in Manang and Tenki.

The eight *tosum* guardians divide themselves into two groups of four to patrol the crop fields of Manang and Tenki each day in the morning and afternoon in order to enforce village rules against the presence of livestock in the village during the agricultural season. When livestock are caught in village fields by the guardians, the owner of the livestock has to pay a fine, which the guardians collectively share as compensation for the time and effort involved in patrolling the fields. Although owners of transgressing animals are seldom happy to pay fines to the *tosum*, the system works because everyone realizes that it is for their own benefit. Everyone would prefer to pay a fine and to have their neighbor pay a fine rather than having their or their neighbor's crop fields irreplaceably damaged by livestock.

Another important example of a traditional system of cooperation still in use in Manang is the regulation of grass cutting. As pointed out earlier in this article, during Manang's long cold winter, the survival of livestock such as cattle, goats, and horses is completely reliant upon the livestock owner's private stock of grass cut and dried at the beginning of the autumn harvest season. As with irrigation, Manang's dry climate limits the amount of grass available for villagers to cut and store, and therefore cooperation among community members is essential to insure that everyone has fair access to this scarce resource.

In Manang, the same regulation of agricultural activities historically carried out by the traditional village council continues to be handled by the Manang village government today. One of the more important of these regulated activities is the starting date for the harvest, which the Manang village government determines for the entire Manang community, including Manang's subsidiary settlements of Tenki, Humde, and Julu. The first day of the harvest is referred to as *chi piba* ("releasing the grass [from cutting restrictions]" – Nyishangte). On this day, literally everyone in Manang arises in the darkness of midnight to fervently cut grass on the communal lands belonging to the village. By early afternoon, all the grass worth cutting has been cut, collected, and carried to villagers' houses to dry. On the second day of *chi piba*, villagers are permitted to cut grass on their own private land, and then on the third day the harvesting of crop fields may begin.²¹ After the last of the villagers' crop fields have been harvested, the village government announces that livestock may be brought back to the village from the summer

pastures and allowed to graze on the remaining stalks of the harvested fields. The regulation of grass-cutting by the village government and the frenzied rush to cut as much grass as possible on the first day of *chi piba* provide an illustrative example of the co-existence of communal cooperation and individual competition in Manang. By cooperatively restricting the cutting of grass on communal lands until a fixed date, fairness in competing for such grass is assured to all villagers.²²

Social Systems of Economic Cooperation in Manang

Historically, as individual members of the Manang community established their own crop fields and engaged in their own trade deals, the community came to embrace private ownership and private enterprise to such a degree that these became essential elements of the community's entrepreneurial culture. But equally important in Manang culture is a strong code of social norms that require all members to cooperate in community affairs, fulfill communal obligations, and maintain balanced reciprocity relations with other members of the community.

As exemplified by the shared building, upkeep, and use of a communal system of irrigation and everyone's adherence to village proscriptions against the presence of livestock in crop fields during the agricultural season and the premature cutting of grass, the efficient management and use of scarce resources that everyone was reliant upon for survival required the socially organized cooperation of the entire community. Community members' recognition of the significant benefits gained from such cooperation facilitated its application to other spheres of Manang society as well. This helps to explain the pervasiveness of cooperation and shared obligations in the management and use of communal forests and pastures, the performance of agricultural activities by reciprocal labor groups, the rotating organization and sponsorship of community events and religious rites, the building of private homes (Marechaux 1981), the generous helping of needy members of the community, and many other situations. As a result, cooperation has become a linchpin of Manang society.

That the balancing of reciprocity relations is taken very seriously in Manang society is illustrated by the rite of distribution conducted in memorial to a deceased person, referred to as *seembā keu* (Nyishangte). Some time after a person dies, everyone in the community gathers at the deceased person's home for an entire day, and the deceased person's family

offers everyone measures of uncooked rice and feeds them tea, homemade beer, and a full meal of cooked rice and lentils. The idea behind this custom is to gather the entire community together to remember and pray for the deceased and to repay everyone from whom the deceased may have taken food or drink during his or her lifetime. Attendees take as much rice as they wish and give as much or as little money for it as they feel is appropriate. Thus, the *seemba keu* memorial rite serves as a sort of final reckoning of the deceased person's reciprocity balance sheet with the community.

Due to the importance placed on both private enterprise and the cooperative fulfillment of communal obligations and reciprocity relations, community members express their identity and enhance their status within the community both through their individual entrepreneurial pursuits and through the cooperation and support they provide to other members of the community. In Manang, individual status comes from the perspective of the community, which places importance on community harmony, cooperation and reciprocity, and generosity toward others. Members of the community are expected to be generous according to their means, with wealthy people expected to be especially liberal in supporting community events and religious rites, commissioning civil and religious works, sponsoring rites of economic re-distribution, and assisting poorer members of the community. Thus, in addition to receiving religious merit according to Tibetan Buddhist precepts for supporting religious and community causes and helping out the needy, a generous benefactor also receives the approval of the community and added status within it. In this way, economic advancement is not attractive merely for the sake of satisfying material needs and desires, it also provides the opportunity to gain religious merit and social status through financial generosity.

This combination of individual competition to achieve material gains and communal cooperation to earn social status is a characteristic feature of Manang society. Rather than conflicting with each other, the seemingly contrasting characteristics of individual competition and communal cooperation have not only co-existed in Manang, they have complemented each other. The resulting balance between private enterprise and communal cooperation has been instrumental to the Manang community's economic success. The most potent example of this is the cooperative financing of private business ventures. Among the entrepreneurial Manang community, the strong tradition of cooperation has carried over to the financial sphere, as

illustrated by the widespread use of personal lending, business partnerships, and rotating credit associations.

In Manang as elsewhere, community members' ability to take advantage of commercial opportunities has largely depended upon the availability of capital to finance private business ventures. Among the Manang community, such capital has been made available through various forms of internal lending, all of which have been based on the communal norms of cooperation and reciprocity permeating Manang society. For reciprocity-based internal lending systems to work, a high degree of solidarity and mutual trust is required among community members, an element that is made more easy in Manang by the ethnic and cultural homogeneity and social cohesiveness of the community:

Differences in the Manang community's internal lending systems during its two periods of entrepreneurial expansion in the 1960s and the 1990s reflect differences in the community's response to the disparate commercial opportunities available in the respective periods. This suggests that the community adapted its venture financing system specifically to the commercial opportunity at hand in order to provide conditions favorable to business activity. Although personal lending has been and continues to be an important source of capital for business ventures, cooperative business partnerships were the principal means of accessing capital for international trade ventures during the entrepreneurial expansion that began in the 1960s. Business partnerships were later supplanted in importance when, during the re-emergence of widespread entrepreneurial activity among the Manang community in the latter 1990s, rotating credit associations became the primary means of pooling and distributing capital for financing tourism business ventures. Each of the three components of the Manang community's venture financing system – loans, business partnerships, and rotating credit associations – and the ways in which those components have changed over time are described below.

Loans

As long as trade ventures involved primarily the bartering of mountain products for lowland grains, cash resources were meager in Manang and the lending of money to finance business pursuits was not a common occurrence. As trade ventures became monetized and expanded in scale, however, cash needs grew and personal loans became an important means of venture

financing. Before trade developed into a year-round business, the seasonal demand for capital was reflected in the terms for personal loans made between members of the Manang community. When traders returned to Manang in the spring following a winter trading trip, they had little use for their accumulated cash earnings in the village, and so a short-term loan during the non-trading season could be obtained from a relative or friend without having to pay interest. In contrast, loans taken just prior to or during the winter trading season, when capital for financing trade ventures was in high demand, required the payment of interest (Messerschmidt 1978: 156-157).

When trade ventures ceased being merely seasonal pursuits, the continuous coming and going of traders at different times created a complementary supply and demand situation for capital. As some traders were returning from trading ventures with their accumulated earnings, other traders were readying to leave and were in need of capital. Thus, it became common for traders returning from abroad to make interest-bearing loans to traders preparing to leave. In this way, borrowers could access the capital needed to finance their trade ventures and lenders could earn returns on their trade earnings even while not abroad trading themselves. Then when it came time for a lender to leave on a trade trip, he would collect the loaned funds plus interest and borrow additional capital from those who had returned with trading profits. As a result of such economic cooperation among entrepreneurs, the level of capitalization of trade ventures expanded rapidly as trade became a year-round pursuit for more and more traders.

Similarly, traders from the Manang community would also lend each other money while abroad. Since trade ventures typically involved the buying and selling of goods in different regions, some traders found themselves short of capital when they were interested in buying goods and then awash in capital after they had sold goods. In such cases, they would borrow money from other traders they knew and then, after selling goods themselves, later lend money to those in need of capital for purchasing goods. Traders from Manang traveling back and forth between international destinations also loaned and borrowed money among each other in order to facilitate their collective ability to afford the monetary deposits associated with the issuance of entry visas for some countries. Monetary deposits, refundable upon timely departure from the country, were collected by immigration officials of some countries as a safeguard to keep foreign visitors from overstaying their visas. As one trader left such a country and his deposit was returned to him, he

would loan the money to another trader preparing to enter the country and in need of funds to pay the deposit. In this way, deposit funds circulated continuously among the Manang trading community. And money was not the only thing exchanged in this fashion. Prior to the grant of Nepali passports to the Nyishangte, traders would also lend and borrow Indian passports among themselves to allow the borrower to travel abroad while the lender returned home to Manang.

With the growth of tourism business opportunities in Manang, personal loans from relatives and friends became an important source of capital for financing business ventures at home as well. Many expensive hotel construction projects in Manang have been financed through long-term loans, often from wealthy relatives living in Kathmandu. Before the use of rotating credit associations for financing business ventures became popular in Manang in the late 1990s, short-term loans from relatives and friends were the primary means of obtaining working capital for the purchase of supplies for hotels, restaurants, and shops in anticipation of and during the tourist season. Unlike in the days of seasonal trade, since capital is now in demand year-round in Manang for purchasing supplies and constructing and expanding tourism businesses, loans now require the payment of interest regardless of when they are taken.

Personal loans between Nyishangte, whether living in Nyishang or Kathmandu, are based on social relations of reciprocity and trust between the lender and borrower. Manang villagers greatly prefer taking personal loans from relatives or friends rather than borrowing from moneylenders or banks because personal loans involve less risk, may be for a longer term, have a flexible repayment schedule, and avoid bureaucracy. Since moneylenders and banks require the assignment of fixed property as collateral to secure the loan, Manang villagers would be putting their most prized possessions – land, house, and business – at risk of forfeiture in case of defaulting on repayment. The forfeiture of local property due to loan default would also entail the social stigma of breaking local norms against selling or assigning land or businesses in Manang to outsiders.²³ In Manang village there are even norms against selling land to Nyishangte from other villages, as well as prohibitions against Nyishangte from other villages owning or operating a business in Manang.²⁴

In contrast to loans from moneylenders or banks, personal loans between Nyishangte do not typically require collateral. Instead, the security is the social relationship between lender and borrower and the borrower's

continued respectability and acceptance among his or her friends, relatives, and community, all of which would be sacrificed in the case of default. That informants were unable to identify a single case of outright default on a personal loan in Manang underscores the serious importance placed on the maintenance of social relations by the community's members.

In addition, while loans from moneylenders and banks are for a fixed term, the term of a personal loan is generally much less rigid and might be extended for an indefinite period, although typically with interest continuing to accrue. Similarly, payment of accrued interest in the case of a loan from a moneylender or bank is according to a fixed schedule, but payment of accrued interest on a personal loan might be determined more loosely according to the financial wherewithal of the borrower and the generosity and patience of the lender.

The difficulties involved with commercial borrowing also deter Manang residents from seeking bank loans. Though theoretically available, obtaining a bank loan in Nepal is a long, cumbersome, and unpredictable bureaucratic process, especially for uneducated, non-high caste, village residents without relatives, friends, or contacts in highly placed bank or government administration positions. To add to the difficulties, the nearest bank is a long eight-hour walk from Manang.

For all of the reasons presented, the advantages of taking a personal loan from a relative or friend are widely perceived by Manang residents to outweigh the higher interest rate typically charged on personal loans than on bank loans. In 2002, the going rate for personal loans in Manang was simple, non-compound interest of one and one-half percent per month, or eighteen percent annually. By comparison, commercial banks in the district headquarters of Chame were charging interest rates of ten to twelve percent annually depending on the repayment schedule, with the lower rate being for payment every three months and the higher rate for yearly payment. Although I found no cases of Manang residents utilizing private moneylenders from outside the Nyishang community, funds from such sources are generally not available at less than thirty percent annual interest in Nepal.

The rationale among Manang entrepreneurs for preferring personal loans over bank loans to finance large scale projects such as the construction of a new hotel is illustrated by the following example. In the late 1990s, a young Nyishangte businessman sold his half of a declining trade business in Kathmandu to his Nyishangte business partner and returned to his childhood

home of Manang to build a large new hotel catering to tourists. To have sufficient land on which to build the hotel, the young entrepreneur had to purchase a plot of land from a relative that was adjacent to the plot along the main trail through the village that the young entrepreneur had inherited from his father. The purchase of this additional plot of land cost about 400,000 rupees. The total cost of hotel construction came to about 7,000,000 rupees. In addition, the purchase of supplies for the hotel's restaurant and bakery and stock for its retail shop cost another 600,000 rupees, bringing the total start-up cost of the venture to about 8,000,000 rupees (about 100,000 U.S. dollars), an extremely large amount of money by Nepali standards.

To finance this huge outlay, the young entrepreneur obtained a loan from a wealthy relative in Kathmandu. As interest on the loan, the young entrepreneur makes a yearly payment of eighteen percent of the remaining principle amount, with the principle expected to be paid back gradually as the profitability of the hotel allows. The hotel is considered one of the nicer hotels in Manang and since opening for business has done reasonably well. With the profits from the first year of operation, the entrepreneur chose to expand his hotel's capacity, hoping to take advantage of the growing number of tourists visiting Manang. However, with the downturn in tourist numbers in 2002, he was barely able to pay the interest on the loan and cover his personal expenses, which primarily involve the education of his children. Like other relatively wealthy Nyishangte, the young entrepreneur has enrolled his two children in private boarding schools, the older in Darjeeling, India and the younger in Kathmandu. But even if tourist numbers in Manang remain depressed, hampering his ability to repay the loan, he is comforted by the fact that he does not face the risk of losing his land, house, and business as he might if he had taken a bank loan. In short, very few Manang residents have sought or taken loans from banks or non-Nyishangte moneylenders, and, as such, these should not be considered important components of Manang's venture financing system.

However, there is another source of loans in Manang beyond those available from relatives and friends that warrants description here, namely those available to Manang residents from the Manang village government. On loans from the Manang village government, simple interest of one percent per month is charged, for an effective annual interest rate of twelve percent. Although these loans do not require the posting of collateral, failure to pay would result in action against the defaulter by the village government, which is perceived as an even greater deterrent against default than in the case of a

personal loan. As such, lending risk for the village government is viewed as less than that for a personal lender, and the lower interest rate on village government loans reflects this.

The Manang village government began making loans to villagers in the late 1990s as a result of an increase in village government funds due to rising tax revenues from local tourism businesses. Although a large portion of the taxes collected from tourism businesses has been used by the Manang village government to pay for religious rites performed on behalf of the community, some of the village government's tax revenues have been made available to villagers in the form of loans. As of 2002, approximately one million rupees (about 13,000 U.S. dollars) were on loan by the village government, with these funds coming from a variety of village-based revenue sources. The village government's normal operating funds, which are allocated yearly to the village by the central government in Kathmandu through the district government in Chame, are not available for lending because these funds are earmarked specifically for village development works.

The funds available for lending by the village government were given a substantial boost in 2001, when several men were caught and fined for trapping musk deer in a forest area belonging to the Manang community.²⁵ With the money collected in fines, the village government established a fund to be used for guarding wildlife and rare plants in Manang against poachers. Money from the fund is loaned to villagers, with the interest earned used to pay villagers to periodically patrol the forest. The principle of the fund is intended for use only in cases of serious injury or death to a villager incurred during a forest patrol, as an insurance policy providing compensation to the victim's family (100,000 rupees for a serious but healable injury such as a broken leg and 300,000 rupees for a death or a life-crippling injury such as blindness).

Another source of village government funds available for lending includes commissions paid to the village government on gambling winnings by Manang residents. The village government has banned gambling outside of certain sanctioned occasions, both to stem problems related to rampant gambling among local residents and to facilitate the collection of gambling commissions by the village government. Yet another source of loans in Manang is a fund created by local hotel owners. Roughly thirty hotel owners from the Manang community paid 5,000 rupees each to create a fund of about 150,000 rupees. These funds are loaned out at the local going rate of eighteen percent annual interest, and the interest earned is used to pay the expenses of

the hotel owners' annual picnic at which the hotel owners gather to discuss and agree upon collective hotel policies for the coming year.

Business Partnerships

As trade ventures increased in scale, duration, and complexity during the Manang community's entrepreneurial expansion in the 1960s, traders increasingly joined together, often with kin or marriage-based relatives, to form cooperative trade partnerships referred to as *chhong ro* ("business friend" – Nyishangte). The formation of partnerships, particularly group partnerships, was especially suitable to the nature of the community's international trade ventures. Group partnerships provided support to individual members by sharing the costs and risks of trade ventures and reducing the difficulties and dangers of foreign travel. Through their membership in *chhong ro* groups, individual traders were able to conduct business at levels unavailable to independent traders. *Chhong ro* groups financed group members' business ventures by making loans to individual members at a low rate of interest and without requiring collateral. Through the pooling of group members' capital resources, the business ventures of the group as a whole were diversified and business risks spread among the partners. *Chhong ro* group partnerships also served to help individual members rebound from business losses, since these were effectively absorbed by the group. Along with expenses, risks, profits, and losses, members of *chhong ro* groups also shared among each other business contacts and trade networks, valuable knowledge of travel routes, markets, and profitable trade items, and information regarding different countries' immigration and customs policies. In addition, some *chhong ro* groups made periodic arrangements with or paid retainer fees to immigration and customs officials to facilitate the international travel and import-export activities of the group's members (Cooke 1985a:103).

In the cooperative, reciprocity-based culture of the Nyishangte, assistance to others, especially relatives, has been considered the obligation of those who have prospered in business. Members of successful *chhong ro* trade groups helped young Nyishangte get started in business by providing them with start-up working capital and with training regarding the vagaries of international trade. In return, young traders were expected to perform high-risk jobs for the group, such as physically transporting smuggled goods, while only receiving a small portion of the profits from such activities.

Young traders were able to become full members of a *chhong ro* group after paying back the capital loaned to them by the *chhong ro* and demonstrating to the group their trustworthiness and their ability to conduct profitable trade business (Cooke 1985a:101-102, 1986:76-77).

There has been a much lower rate of participation in business partnerships among hotel entrepreneurs in Manang than had been the case among those involved in international trade. The less frequent use of business partnerships among Manang hotel owners can be explained by the nature of local hotel business lending itself less to cooperative ventures and more to intra-group competition than had been the case with trade. A hotel requires a large, one-time, long-term investment in local fixed property, namely the construction of a hotel on land in Manang. Trade entailed smaller, more frequent, short-term purchases of mobile trade commodities such as curios, jewelry, clothing, or electronic equipment. International trade ventures took traders away from home to unfamiliar and potentially dangerous places where theft was a continuous concern. Much was to be gained by teaming up with other traders to travel abroad, sell in busy night-time street bazaars, and share the cost of food and lodging while away from home. The short-term risks of trade could be shared and thus diversified among groups of traders continuously turning over their wares much more easily than the long-term risk of building and operating a hotel can be shared or diversified among a group.

Another major reason for the low incidence of hotel business partnerships in Manang is the local cultural norm of individual ownership of fixed property such as land and houses. Land and houses were not involved in trade ventures and thus were never the subject of trading partnerships. With the importance placed on ownership of land and houses in Manang and the strong inhibitions against selling such fixed property even to other Nyishangte, it is culturally difficult for business partners to jointly own the fixed property on which a hotel business would be based. In addition, hotels in Manang typically serve as the house in which the hotel owner's family lives, and there is a strong preference in Manang village culture for a nuclear family to own and reside in its own house. Out of fifteen hotels in Manang village, there are only three cases of hotel partnerships, and these are all between two siblings. In these cases, it is not feasible to split up the fixed property on which the business is based, and so instead the business is operated jointly by the siblings and their nuclear families. It is also important

to point out that each of the hotels thus jointly operated is more than large enough to provide comfortable and private lodging for both nuclear families.

Although individual ownership remains the overwhelming norm for tourism businesses in Manang, recent increases in construction costs and competition have made business partnerships more attractive to entrepreneurs unable or unwilling to undertake the cost, risk, and management of a new business venture on their own. Except for a couple cases of siblings who had remained together in the same household after marriage in order to run the family's tourism business, there were no business partnerships in Manang between members of separate nuclear families prior to the late 1990s. Between 1998 and 2000, however, seven new tourism businesses in Manang were launched and operated through such types of partnerships. Although all of these partnerships were between members of separate nuclear families, in each case the partners were kin or marriage-based relatives. This illustrates the importance that family relations continue to have in economic activity, as in the days of the Manang community's entrepreneurial expansion in the 1960s, when *chhong ro* trading groups were frequently comprised of kin or marriage-based relatives.

In contrast to the sometimes large membership of *chhong ro* trading groups, the largest tourism business partnership formed thus far among members of the Manang community was forged by four households all related to each other through either kin or marriage-based ties. The four parties allied together in 2000 to share the otherwise prohibitive start-up costs, management duties, and competitive risks associated with building and operating a new hotel in a remote and high-altitude location where a well-established competing hotel had monopolized business for nearly two decades. The formation of a four-way partnership would likely have been constrained by cultural norms favoring single nuclear family ownership of land and occupation of house if the hotel had been located in Manang village. But the hotel's remote location two days walk away from the village made partnering easier since the land on which the hotel was built is communal land rented by the partnership from the Manang village government and since the hotel does not serve as the home of any of the partnering families.

The majority of cases of tourism business partnerships in Manang involve less highly capitalized businesses such as tea shops and restaurants and less traditional, therefore more risky, tourism ventures like movie halls, a boat rental operation, and a billiard hall. In many of these cases the business is located on rented land, and in none of the cases does the business serve as

someone's home. Unlike owners of hotels, owners of less highly capitalized businesses are generally less likely to be able to afford hiring staff to help operate their business, thus partnering has the added benefit of enabling partners to share the work of running the venture. That there are no cases of partnerships among small retail shops in Manang can be explained by the fact that small retail shops require less capital to start-up and are more easily run by a single person or household.

In Manang, partnerships have been very common among young women entrepreneurs running local tea shops (*bhatti* – Nepali). The long continuing tradition of two or three young women forming a reciprocal labor group to perform agricultural and domestic tasks is mirrored in the similar norm of two to three young women forming a partnership to start-up and operate a tea shop. Young women tea shop owners are often relatively poorly capitalized, and joining together helps them to afford the start-up investment or to recruit lenders and creditors from among the partners' relatives. In addition, the nature of running a tea shop that may be frequented at night by single men who include strangers from outside of Nyishang means that joint operation by two to three young women is deemed safer, more practical, and more socially acceptable than individual operation would be. Such tea shop businesses are a splendid example of a type of widespread, readily accepted entrepreneurial activity in Manang that occurs less frequently in Nepal's mainstream Hindu society where women, particularly young unmarried women, traditionally have had less freedom due to constraints imposed by strict socio-cultural norms.

Although some tourism entrepreneurs in Manang have used business partnerships as a way of pooling capital to start a new business, the importance of this means of accessing venture financing is considerably less in Manang today than it had been among traders a generation earlier and considerably less than it remains among the Nyishangte business community in Kathmandu. Instead, beginning in the late 1990s, tourism entrepreneurs in Manang have come to rely heavily on local rotating credit associations to access capital for business purposes.

Rotating Credit Associations

Rotating credit associations act to pool the financial resources of a group and make those resources available to individuals in the group turn by turn. Through such pooling, each member in the rotating credit association is able

to access at one time much greater financial resources than would be possible individually, thereby enabling each member to meet a pressing financial need, make an investment in a business venture, or perhaps earn a financial return on the funds invested in the rotating credit association.

Prior to the 1960s, the use of rotating credit associations in Nepal seems to have been limited to groups residing in the country's north-central highlands, an area that includes Nyishang, from where it has since spread to other parts of the country (Pignede 1966:146, Messerschmidt 1978:152-154). In the north-central highlands, rotating credit associations were previously referred to by the name *dhi-kur* or *dhu-kor* ("rotation of grain" – Thakali, Nyishangte),²⁶ but in recent years the name *dhukuti* ("treasury" – Nepali) has come into general use throughout Nepal (Messerschmidt 1978:155, Vinding 1984:101).

In Nepal's north-central highlands, a *dhukuti* is typically organized by a person in financial need who recruits relatives, friends, and acquaintances to participate as equal shareholder members. Normally, a *dhukuti* includes between ten to thirty members of a common ethnic community who know and trust each other well and who have both sufficient financial means to meet the obligations of participating in a rotating credit association and sufficient local fixed property to serve as collateral in case of default. If a member's financial resources are not perceived by the other members as sufficient, the member may be required to arrange for the backing of a wealthy guarantor to assume responsibility in the event of the member's default. The members of a *dhukuti* meet on a regularly scheduled basis, generally at least two times per year. The size of the fund and the rules of the *dhukuti* are agreed upon by the members at the first meeting. Since the size of the fund is typically determined by the amount needed by the organizer, it may vary greatly from one *dhukuti* to the next.

At every meeting, all of the members pay an equal installment into the fund, and one member takes the fund, which is equal to the sum total of the installments paid at that meeting minus an agreed upon amount to pay for expenses incurred at the meeting. In some types of *dhukuti*, the installment amount, and thus the size of the fund, remains the same at each meeting throughout the duration of the *dhukuti*. In other types, the installment amount increases over time by a simple rate of interest. In what is referred to in Manang as a "tender" *dhukuti*, the installment amount is determined by a system of competitive bidding among the members at each meeting. In all cases, the organizer of the *dhukuti* takes the fund at the first meeting. The

order in which the other members take the fund in subsequent meetings is determined in one of a variety of manners: by relative need (agreed upon by consensus of the members at each meeting), by chance (via lottery or casting dice at the first meeting), or, in the tender *dhukuti*, by competitive bidding (among the remaining fund takers at each meeting). A *dhukuti* is finished after each member has taken the fund once in turn. As a result, based upon the number of members and the frequency of meeting, a *dhukuti* may last for several years.

The tender *dhukuti* is worth explaining in greater detail, because it is this type of rotating credit association that helped facilitate the remarkable expansion of entrepreneurial activity among the Manang community in the late 1990s. In a tender *dhukuti*, as with other types of *dhukuti*, the organizer takes the entire fund in the first round. In each subsequent round (except for the last round when there is only one member remaining who has not yet taken the fund), the order of taking the fund, the amount of the installment paid by each member, and the amount of the fund taken are determined by competitive bidding among the remaining members who have not yet taken the fund. The highest bidder in a particular round takes the fund in that round, but only after the amount of the winning bid is subtracted and split up equally among all of the members. Thus, the higher the winning bid, the smaller the fund that the winning bidder gets to take, and the smaller the effective installment that the other members have to pay in that round. This system provides those members with greater demand for capital quicker access to the fund, but at a price that reflects the demand for capital among the membership.

As competitive bidding in the early rounds drives up the price of taking the fund, the financial cost of accessing capital rises for the early takers and the financial return obtained from investing in the *dhukuti* grows for those who are willing to wait until the later rounds to take the fund. The organizer also benefits from a situation of high demand for capital since high bidding among other members reduces the size of the installments that must be paid into the fund. The early takers of the fund are essentially borrowers who, except for the organizer, pay a premium for accessing the fund early, and the later takers are essentially lenders receiving compensation for keeping their capital tied up in the *dhukuti*.

Participating in a tender *dhukuti* suits an entire spectrum of business interests. For those with a need for funds, it provides an attractive instrument through which to access capital at a price and in a time frame that reflects

each person's relative demand. For those with surplus wealth, it provides an equally attractive instrument in which to invest capital and obtain a high return. For the organizer, it provides quick access to capital and an attractive financial benefit to counter the hassle of organizing the *dhukuti* and hosting its meetings for several years. It is the bringing together and serving of such varied yet complementary business interests that makes the tender *dhukuti* work so well. And since the financial return obtained from organizing and investing in a tender *dhukuti* increases as the local demand for capital rises, community members are motivated to organize and participate in as many tender *dhukuti* as the local demand for capital will support. Thus, the tender *dhukuti* serves as an efficient market-based credit pricing mechanism that effectively accommodates variable situations of demand for capital and attracts investment funds.

In the region of Mustang neighboring Nyishang to the west, the Thakali and Baaragaonle communities have a long history of using *dhukuti* (von Furer-Haimendorf 1975:197-201). Indeed, the idea of using *dhukuti* quite possibly came to Manang from the people of Mustang, with whom the Nyishangte had historical economic, political, and cultural contact. Several scholars have noted the Thakali's use of *dhukuti* for financing business ventures and pointed to it as a factor in their rise as one of the leading entrepreneurial communities in Nepal (Manzardo and Sharma 1975:36, Manzardo 1978:99, Messerschmidt 1978:154, Vinding 1984:89-91, Vinding 1998:131, Chhetri 1986:249-250, von der Heide 1988:42, Zivetz 1992:102). Not all of the entrepreneurial communities in highland Nepal, however, have used *dhukuti*. The Khumbu Sherpa, for example, rather than using rotating credit associations to access capital for business ventures, have relied instead on wages earned as trekking or climbing guides and on funding from or partnerships with foreign visitors (von Furer-Haimendorf 1975:86-88; Brower 1991:81; Zivetz 1992:107-112; Stevens 1993a:373-374, 499; Stevens 1993b:415-416; Adams 1996:9, 221).

In Manang, *dhukuti* seem to have been used only sparingly prior to the late 1990s and more often for the purpose of helping a fellow villager in personal financial crisis than for financing business ventures or earning a financial return on an investment. Traditionally in Manang, after the organizer took the fund in the initial round, the subsequent order of taking the fund by the other members was determined by chance, usually in the form of a lottery. In cases where the *dhukuti* was formed purely for altruistic purposes, no interest accrued and the amount of the fund remained the same

in each round. In cases where it was formed for business purposes, interest accrued and the amount of the fund increased over time to reflect the time value of money.

Among the Nyishangte entrepreneurial community that migrated to Kathmandu, *dhukuti* came to be used almost exclusively for financing commercial ventures. As their economic pursuits grew and their demand for capital increased, Kathmandu-resident Nyishangte entered into large *dhukuti* with members of other ethnic groups residing and doing business in Kathmandu. In this manner, it is likely that Nyishangte living in Kathmandu adopted the tender form of *dhukuti* from members of the Thakali business community who, similar to the Nyishangte, had moved to Kathmandu in pursuit of commercial opportunities.

Following the out-migration to Kathmandu of the wealthier and more entrepreneurial members of the community in the 1970s and 1980s, *dhukuti* seem to have fallen completely out of use in Manang. Few of the people who remained in Manang during this period had the financial wherewithal to participate in *dhukuti*. However, the involvement of an increasing number of Manang villagers in profitable tourism businesses in the 1990s raised local financial resources and enabled the community to revive the use of *dhukuti* when a situation calling for it arose.

In 1998, a dire personal financial crisis emerged for a member of the Manang community. Unable to pay the rent that had come due for the property on which he had built his modest hotel and residence, the villager was faced with the devastating prospect of losing both his business and home. Although *dhukuti* had not been used in Manang for many years, the concept was not new to the community, and the needy villager was able to organize a group of thirty people with sufficient financial resources to participate in a traditional, non-interest bearing, lottery style *dhukuti*. Based upon the amount needed by the organizer, the members agreed to pay installments in each round of 5000 rupees (about 64 U.S. dollars) each to comprise a fund of 150,000 rupees (about 1900 U.S. dollars). The needy organizer took the first turn at receiving the fund. Another villager in personal financial need asked and was permitted by the other members to take the second turn at receiving the fund. The order of subsequent turns was determined by lottery. The location of the meeting has rotated among the houses of the various members, with the designated taker of the fund in each round hosting the meeting at his expense. With thirty members meeting three times per year, the *dhukuti* was set to last for ten years. But because the

dhukuti paid no interest, the members expecting to receive the fund near the end wished to speed up the *dhukuti* in order to get earlier access to the capital they were tying up for no financial return. To accomplish that, the members agreed to pay double installments and dispense two funds at each meeting, effectively halving the time required for completing the *dhukuti*.

The rapid growth of tourism business development by Manang entrepreneurs in the late 1990s greatly increased the local demand for both investment and working capital. As explained in the previous section on business partnerships, the hotel business in Manang was not well suited to the *chhong ro* style of group partnerships that had been used to finance international trade ventures, and so an alternative means of cooperative financing was needed. In response to this need, members of the Manang community took an old social system of economic cooperation, the rotating credit association, and adopted a modified version of it to fit their changing business needs. The revival of the old lottery style *dhukuti* had inspired local entrepreneurs to think of using *dhukuti* for financing business ventures, but the lottery style *dhukuti* was not dynamic enough to meet the rapidly growing local demand for capital or to attract investment funds. But entrepreneurs who had returned to Manang from Kathmandu in the 1990s were familiar with another kind of *dhukuti*, the tender style, which they introduced to other Manang residents.

The Manang entrepreneurial community was quick to adopt the tender style *dhukuti* as a source of needed business capital. After the first tender *dhukuti* was started in Manang in 1999 with 23 members, two more were organized in 2000 with 26 and 30 members, followed by two more in 2001 with 30 and 31 members. The speed at which the size of membership reached the preferred number of thirty members reflects the rapid acceptance and popularity of the use of tender *dhukuti* among Manang's entrepreneurial community.

The overwhelming majority of *dhukuti* participants are hotel owners from Manang and Manang's subsidiary settlements of Humde and Tenki. There are very few participants from other villages due to much lower level of entrepreneurial activity and wealth and, therefore, lower demand for venture financing and lower supply of investment capital. Compared to forty-three *dhukuti* participants from Manang and its subsidiary settlements, there are only four from the village of Braga, two from Pisang, one from Khangsar, and none from the other Nyishang villages of Ngawal and Gyaru. Of these fifty participants, only five are women, but the strong male majority reflects

the local domination of business by men rather than any proscriptions against women's participation in *dhukuti*.

The following example illustrates how a typical tender *dhukuti* works in Manang. A person in need of capital invites relatives and friends to participate in a rotating credit association. When invited by a person organizing a new *dhukuti*, there is no obligation to join. Some people have a need for capital. Some have excess capital to invest. Some may participate more for social than for economic reasons. The members of a *dhukuti* gather for meetings held every two months, for a total of six meetings per year. Meetings are not held from December through February while many villagers are spending the winter outside of Manang. To make up for the skipped winter meeting, an extra meeting is held in the spring.

At every meeting, each member pays an installment of 10,000 rupees (about 130 U.S. dollars). Thus, in a thirty-member *dhukuti*, the fund at each meeting amounts to 300,000 rupees (about 3800 U.S. dollars). A set amount of 4000 rupees is subtracted from the fund taken in each round to pay for food and drinks consumed at the meeting. But this amount is not sufficient to cover the total cost of the food and drink consumed at each meeting, which for a *dhukuti* with thirty members typically comes to about 8000 rupees. The extra 4000 rupees expense for each meeting must be paid by the *dhukuti* organizer, at whose home all of the meetings are held. To help offset the organizer's expense, a portion, typically ten percent, of the winnings from the gambling that takes place among the members during each *dhukuti* meeting is given to the organizer. This gambling commission typically amounts to between 1000 and 2000 rupees, depending on how many members gamble, how long they gamble, and what type of games and stakes are involved.

At the first meeting, the organizer takes a fund of 286,000 rupees (the 300,000 rupee fund, minus the organizer's own 10,000 rupee installment, minus the 4000 rupee expense withholding), has a personal expense of 4000 rupees, and receives perhaps 1500 rupees as gambling commission for a net take of 283,500 rupees. In the second meeting, if the highest bid is, for example, 165,000 rupees, then the highest bidder takes a net fund of 126,500 rupees (the 300,000 rupee fund, minus the highest bidder's own 10,000 rupee installment, minus the 4000 rupee expense withholding, minus the 165,000 rupee bid, plus the 5500 rupees that each of the thirty members get back from the 165,000 rupee bid). A minimum bid of 35,000 rupees is required, although during the last three rounds the minimum bid amount decreases to 30,000 rupees, 20,000 rupees, and finally 10,000 rupees in the last round. If,

for example, there are only two members remaining who have not yet taken the fund and they both bid the minimum 20,000 rupees, then the taker of the fund is determined by a lottery between the two. In the last round, since only one member remains to take the fund and there is no one to bid against, the minimum bid of 10,000 must be paid and the net fund taken is 276,333 rupees (the 300,000 rupee fund, minus the fund taker's own 10,000 rupee installment, minus the 4000 rupee expense withholding, minus the 10,000 rupee minimum bid, plus 333 rupees that each of the thirty members get back from the 10,000 rupee minimum bid).

To demonstrate how a typical tender *dhukuti* in Manang might progress from start to finish, I have included below a chart of the tabulated results from a computer spreadsheet model representation of such a *dhukuti*. The chart shows for each round the highest bid amount, the net installment paid by each of the members, the net fund taken, and the cash flow of various members. The spreadsheet model rationally assumes that the highest bid over the course of the *dhukuti* occurs in the second round and that the highest bid in each subsequent round declines linearly down to the amount of the minimum bids required in the final four rounds. Based on the actual history of tender *dhukuti* bidding in Manang, the highest bid used in the spreadsheet model is 165,000 rupees.

In order to understand the relative economics of *dhukuti* participation in Manang, the spreadsheet model includes a net-present-value (NPV) financial calculation in which various *dhukuti* members' cash flows are discounted to reflect the time value of money using a discount rate obtained from the most common alternative to *dhukuti* financing or investing, that of taking or making personal loans at the local going rate of interest for such loans. Since the local going rate of interest on personal loans in Manang is 1.5 percent per month, a monthly discount rate of 1.015 is used in the NPV calculation. The formula employed in the NPV calculation is:

$$NPV_a = CFA_1 + CFA_2 / (1 + (INT \times T_2)) + \dots + CFA_N / (1 + (INT \times T_N))$$

where:

NPV_a = net-present-value of cash flows for member A (at start of *dhukuti*)

CFA₁ = cash flow for member A in round 1 of the *dhukuti*

INT = going rate of simple monthly interest for a personal loan in Manang

T₂ = number of months between the start of the *dhukuti* and round 2

From the results of the NPV calculation shown in the chart, it can be seen that the *dhukuti* organizer has a large positive NPV, and thus a large financial benefit compared to taking a personal loan at the local going rate of interest. In fact, the financial benefit obtained from organizing the *dhukuti* is even preferable to being given an interest-free loan. This benefit is offset, although arguably only partially, by the hassle the organizer has to endure in setting up and hosting the *dhukuti* and the theoretical risk he faces of having to make good on the default of a member without a sponsor.²⁷ In contrast, it can be seen that high-bidding early takers of the *dhukuti* fund have a fairly large negative NPV. This is offset by the quick, low hassle access to capital needed for business ventures that is afforded by bidding high to take the fund early. Low-bidding late takers of the *dhukuti* fund have a slightly negative NPV, but this is offset by the benefit of low risk, low hassle investment of capital. The last two takers of the *dhukuti* fund have a slightly positive NPV as well as the benefit of low risk, low hassle investment of capital. The very last fund taker earns an effective annual interest rate of about twenty-one percent on the money invested in the *dhukuti*, which is preferable to the eighteen percent annual interest typically earned from making a personal loan.

Although not represented in the financial model, all members benefit from the social aspects of *dhukuti* participation – gathering for an entire afternoon with friends and relatives to relax, talk, drink and eat well, and play card or dice games. And there is another, perhaps more important, social aspect as well. Along with membership in a *dhukuti* comes an associated social status in the community as a successful businessperson considered responsible, trustworthy, and financially secure enough to be invited to participate.

Model of Tender *Dhukuti* Rotating Credit Association in Manang (in rupees)

round	winning tender bid	each member's payment	winner's net take	1st taker's cash flow	2nd taker's cash flow	10th taker's cash flow	20th taker's cash flow	last taker's cash flow
1	0	10000	283500	283500	-10000	-10000	-10000	-10000
2	165000	4500	126500	-7000	126500	-4500	-4500	-4500
3	159800	4673	131527	-7173	-4673	-4673	-4673	-4673
4	154600	4847	136553	-7347	-4847	-4847	-4847	-4847
5	149400	5020	141580	-7520	-5020	-5020	-5020	-5020
6	144200	5193	146607	-7693	-5193	-5193	-5193	-5193
7	139000	5367	151633	-7867	-5367	-5367	-5367	-5367
8	133800	5540	156660	-8040	-5540	-5540	-5540	-5540
9	128600	5713	161687	-8213	-5713	-5713	-5713	-5713
10	123400	5887	166713	-8387	-5887	166713	-5887	-5887
11	118200	6060	171740	-8560	-6060	-6060	-6060	-6060
12	113000	6233	176767	-8733	-6233	-6233	-6233	-6233
13	107800	6407	181793	-8907	-6407	-6407	-6407	-6407
14	102600	6580	186820	-9080	-6580	-6580	-6580	-6580
15	97400	6753	191847	-9253	-6753	-6753	-6753	-6753
16	92200	6927	196873	-9427	-6927	-6927	-6927	-6927
17	87000	7100	201900	-9600	-7100	-7100	-7100	-7100
18	81800	7273	206927	-9773	-7273	-7273	-7273	-7273
19	76600	7447	211953	-9947	-7447	-7447	-7447	-7447

20	71400	7620	216980	-10120	-7620	216980	-7620	276333
21	66200	7793	222007	-10293	-7793	-7793	-7793	5080
22	61000	7967	227033	-10467	-7967	-7967	-7967	
23	55800	8140	232060	-10640	-8140	-8140	-8140	
24	50600	8313	237087	-10813	-8313	-8313	-8313	
25	45400	8487	242113	-10987	-8487	-8487	-8487	
26	40200	8660	247140	-11160	-8660	-8660	-8660	
27	35000	8833	252167	-11333	-8833	-8833	-8833	
28	30000	9000	257000	-11500	-9000	-9000	-9000	
29	20000	9333	266667	-11833	-9333	-9333	-9333	
30	10000	9667	276333	-12167	-9667	-9667	-9667	
NPV			94055	-20676	-11955	-4804	5080	

Manang's entrepreneurial community has come to prefer the tender *dhukuti* over the non-interest bearing, lottery *dhukuti* and over personal loans because the tender *dhukuti* enables quick access to capital for needy entrepreneurs and high returns for investors, with lower risk and less hassle than personal loans. In a non-interest bearing lottery *dhukuti*, the timing for receiving the fund is determined by chance, and the time value returns for the fund's investors, i.e. everyone except the organizer, are negative. In a tender *dhukuti*, however, an entrepreneur in need of capital can access the fund quickly by bidding aggressively, and an investor can earn an attractive financial return by waiting until the end to take the fund.

Joining a *dhukuti* is considered less risky and less trouble than making personal loans due to the group dynamic of *dhukuti* participation. With a group of some thirty people to potentially apply pressure against or pursue a defaulter, default in a *dhukuti* is considered less likely than in the case of a personal loan where applying pressure against or pursuing a defaulter would be up to the lender alone. Whether lending or borrowing, it is much easier to participate in one *dhukuti* than to lend or borrow the equivalent amount of money to or from many individuals. And in a *dhukuti*, unlike with a personal loan, lenders and borrowers do not have to face the awkward interpersonal situation of requesting or being requested to make payments on time or pay back the loan's principle. In addition, it is easier to decline participation in a *dhukuti* than to decline making a personal loan when asked by a friend or relative.

Another explanation for the popularity of the tender *dhukuti* in Manang is the perception, even among early high bidders (who do not have the benefit of computer spreadsheet models), that the cost of accessing *dhukuti* funds is less than the cost of taking a personal loan at the local going rate of interest. Although, with the exception of the *dhukuti* organizer, the above computer model refutes this, it is true that in an environment of potentially decreasing interest rates, which was the case in Manang in 2002 due to decreased demand for capital because of the decline of tourist numbers, the cost of accessing capital over the term of a *dhukuti* would potentially decrease with lower bidding competition, while the interest rate paid on a personal loan would remain fixed at the rate agreed to at the time the loan was made.

The penchant for competing and gambling among the men of Manang has also contributed to the popularity of *dhukuti* participation. In Manang, participating in a rotating credit association is referred to as "playing" *dhukuti* (*dhukuti khelne* – Nepali), and indeed it is perceived, approached, and

participated in as a game to be played and enjoyed, a form of friendly competition among one's peers that also serves as one of the limited occasions on which gambling is allowed by the village government.

Due to their popularity, many entrepreneurs in Manang have chosen to participate in several *dhukuti* at once. The adoption and proliferation of the tender *dhukuti* in Manang in the late 1990s effectively created a local market for capital where credit could be accessed at a market-based price directly reflecting the local demand. By lowering the risk and raising the returns associated with investing capital and by lowering the trouble and the perceived cost of accessing it, the use of *dhukuti* greatly facilitated the pooling of capital in Manang and made such capital available to a large portion of the community. In this way, the widespread use of tender *dhukuti* played an important role in the re-emergence of Manang as a prominent entrepreneurial community in the late 1990s.

Despite the very positive role the tender-style *dhukuti* has played in the recent expansion of entrepreneurial activity in Manang, rotating credit associations should not necessarily be seen as a panacea for all credit hungry communities. Successful rotating credit associations require a great deal of mutual trust and cooperation among the members. There have been significant problems with the use of rotating credit associations in areas of Nepal where membership is drawn from a relatively large population and is not homogenous or tightly bound. For example, rotating credit associations organized in Kathmandu have included participants from many different ethnic groups, including Newar, Marwari, Bahun-Chhetri, Thakali, Sherpa, Tibetan, Gurung, and Nyishangte. Among mixed ethnicity rotating credit associations in Kathmandu, problems have arisen due to the lack of effective social pressure to regulate behavior and the difficulty of punishing defaulters. In cases of mixed-ethnicity rotating credit associations, social stigma associated with default is ineffective in dissuading people from defaulting because members belong to different communities. And in many cases of default, members of mixed-ethnicity rotating credit associations have been unable to collect collateral from a defaulter due to a lack of personal knowledge about the defaulter's whereabouts, the defaulter's family or social network, or the defaulter's fixed property. I know of several Nyishangte and Newar businessmen who stopped participating in rotating credit associations in Kathmandu because of such problems, and some scholars have reported that the use of rotating credit associations has declined in Kathmandu in recent years (Zivetz 1992:103, Muhlich 1997:208).

But rotating credit associations in Manang have not suffered from these problems. In all the cooperative affairs of the Manang community from irrigation to rotating credit associations, there is a strong and justifiable belief that outsiders' behavior would not be held in check by the same obligations of cooperation as are members of the community. To participate in a Manang village *dhukuti*, one must be a well-known and trusted member of the community. In addition, one must have local fixed property serving as effective collateral worth much more than the *dhukuti* fund that could be made off with, or else have a sponsor with such collateral, or else wait until the last round of the *dhukuti* to take the fund. And if a change in circumstances were to preclude a *dhukuti* member from being able to meet his or her payment obligation, as a member of the community he or she could obtain support from a relative or friend to cover the debt until he or she is able to pay.

Essentially, because cheating in a Manang village *dhukuti* is readily detectable and easily punishable, peer pressure has been perfectly effective in preventing it from occurring. In Manang, *dhukuti* members are bound by very strong socio-cultural norms against cheating members of their own community, and the social stigma that would accompany default is so high as to dissuade its occurrence. As a result, *dhukuti* members perceive the likelihood of default by other members as nil, and indeed there has not been a single case of default in Manang. Under the conditions of mutual trust and reciprocal cooperation that prevail in Manang, rotating credit is considered virtually risk free, and, as a result, the price of rotating credit can be based solely on the local demand for capital. Thus, in a relatively small, homogenous, cooperative community such as Manang the tender *dhukuti* has worked remarkably well. In general, the perceived lack of default risk on economic arrangements between members of the Manang community has been important in creating and maintaining an environment that is conducive for widespread economic cooperation through lending, partnering, and participating in rotating credit associations.

But before one starts to think that the Manang community's cooperative ethic alone is enough to preclude any problems that might occur with social systems of economic cooperation, a final example is worth considering. The problem-free use of rotating credit associations in Manang contrasts starkly with the obstacles encountered recently with another form of socially organized economic cooperation in Manang. As competition grew in the 1990s among hotels in Manang, hotel owners banded together to cooperate in

setting fixed prices for hotel rooms in order to guard against the perils of price-based competition. But hotel owners have faced difficulties in detecting and punishing competitors who cheat by offering hotel rooms at prices below those fixed by Manang's cartel-like association of hotel owners. Since local hotel owners perceive cheating by other hotel owners as likely, there have been problems of non-compliance with the fixed pricing policies.

The situation reached crisis proportions in 2001, when a rift among owners of hotels along the trekking route beyond Manang village resulted in several hotel owners quitting the cartel and engaging in heated price wars with each other to attract business. Within a short time, all the hotels along the trekking route beyond Manang village had dropped their room prices to their marginal cost and were operating unprofitably, a scenario consistent with that predicted by the Bertrand model of competition.²⁸ Despite general recognition that re-establishing the fixed pricing policies would be in the best interest of all involved, the price war situation continued throughout 2002 to the hotel owners' collective detriment. And despite widespread agreement that an effective system of detecting and punishing cheaters, something perhaps akin to the community's *tosum* system for protecting crop fields from livestock depredation, is badly needed to stem the problem of mistrust among competing hotel owners, no such policing system had been implemented by the end of 2002.

It remains to be seen whether the cooperative ethic of the Manang community will be strong enough to overcome the problem of heightened competition brought on by an over-capacity of hotels relative to declining tourist numbers. But as the material presented in this article has demonstrated, the solution would likely involve the community's development of some sort of social system that proves effective in insuring the economic cooperation of all members. For that has been the key to the entrepreneurial Manang community's turning commercial opportunities into economic success.

Notes

1. Nepal's Himalayan highlands are home to at least eleven distinct indigenous groups, each with its own traditional geographic region: Dolpo, Lo, Baaragaon, Nyishang (Manang), Nar-Phu, Nubri, Tsum, Langtang, Rolwaling, Khumbu, and Kanchenjunga. In these regions, human settlements are located at altitudes over 3000 meters (10,000 feet). Between 1999 and 2002, I visited eight of these

eleven regions to gain insight into the similarities and differences of these regions and the peoples who inhabit them.

2. These communities include the Thakali of Thak Khola, the Nyishangte of Manang, and the Sherpa of Khumbu.
3. While conducting research and writing my Ph.D. dissertation manuscript and this article, I spent eighteen months in Nyishang and Kathmandu between 2000 and 2003. I would like to thank all the Nyishangte people who welcomed me into their community, into their homes, and around their hearths and shared information about their lives, their businesses, and their society. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support provided for my research by the United States Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad program, the University of California at Berkeley, Jon Krakauer's Everest '96 Memorial Fund, and the American Alpine Club.
4. Notable examples of trade monopolies include those granted by the government to the Thakali of Thak Khola, the Gurung of Lamjung, the Newar of Kathmandu, the Sherpa of Khumbu, and the Walongchung of Kanchenjunga.
5. Nyishang is actually the Tibetan name for the large valley in which the village of Manang is located. In their native language, the valley's inhabitants formerly referred to their home region as *Mano Chhasum*. But the Nyishang region and its indigenous people have come to be popularly referred to throughout Nepal as Manang and Manangi, respectively, after the name of the region's largest village. Following this popular convention, government authorities in Kathmandu gave the entire political district in which Manang village is located the name Manang when the district boundary was demarcated in the 1960s. In fact, such is the prevalence throughout Nepal of referring to the Nyishang region and the Nyishangte people and language as Manang and Manangi that the Nyishangte people themselves these days generally refer to their entire region as Manang and to themselves and their language as Manangi. To minimize confusion, however, in this article I have used the name Nyishang when referring to the region, Nyishangte when referring to the region's indigenous people and their native language, and Manang when referring specifically to the village of Manang. When referring to other villages and place names in Nyishang, I have used the names in current popular use rather than the more obscure names that often exist in the Nyishangte language. Nyishangte and Nepali words used in the text are indicated by italics and the source language is noted in parentheses.
6. For more detail on historic and recent entrepreneurial activity by members of the Manang community as well as the various factors that have facilitated it, see my Ph.D. dissertation manuscript (Rogers 2004). In addition, Cooke (1985a, 1985b, 1986), van Spengen (1987, 1992), N. Gurung (1976, 1977), Schrader (1988), and Watkins (1993, 1996) provide some details of the Manang community's history of entrepreneurial activity, but only in regard to trade and only up to the 1980s.
7. For example, Pohle (1986:119) listed an average annual precipitation amount of 3166 millimeters on the southern side of the Annapurna Himal at Khudi in 1972-1982, compared to less than one-seventh of that, 443 millimeters, at Manang in 1976-1982.

8. It has been suggested that the Nyishangte were given these privileges by the king of Lamjung in exchange for their help in building a fort for the king in the 16th century near what is now Gaunshahar village in Lamjung (H. Gurung 1980:226-227). Another possibility is that the privileges were bestowed upon the Nyishangte by the Lamjung king in return for their joining forces with Lamjung in the 17th century to repel troops from Jumla in western Nepal (Mathes 2001:170).
9. According to von Furer-Haimendorf (1983:92), the region of Nar-Phu to the northeast of Nyishang was politically part of Tibet until taken by Nepal in the mid 19th century. This means that Nyishang formed Nepal's northern frontier border with Tibet at the time the Nepal government granted privileges to the region's residents from the late 18th century to the mid 19th century.
10. The list of years in which Nyishangte trade privileges were renewed has been pieced together from a variety of sources. The renewal of 1802 was mentioned by Cooke (1985a:304), 1825 by N. Gurung (1976:308, 1977a:224), 1844 by H. Gurung (1980:227), 1857 by N. Gurung (1976:308), 1883 by Cooke (1985a:307-308), 1905 by van Spengen (1987:143), 1933 by van Spengen (1987:143), 1964 by Cooke (1985a:309), 1966 by Regmi (1983:67-68), and 1972 by N. Gurung (1976:301).
11. The term *Bhotia* has historically been used by lowland Hindus to refer to highland peoples living in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural sphere. The word derives from *Bhot*, an old Hindu term for Tibet.
12. There are other factors that may also have contributed to the Nepal government's decision to allow the Nyishangte's special trade privileges to expire. These include popular pressure to discontinue favorable treatment of particular ethnic groups as stipulated in Nepal's constitution and perhaps rising criticism of perceived Nyishangte involvement in illegal trade practices (van Spengen 1987:228).
13. The land referred to here as *Naya Mulak* ("new land" – Nepali) had been taken from Nepal by the British under the treaty that ended the war between Nepal and Britain in 1814-1816. The land was restored to Nepal by the British in 1860 in appreciation for Nepal's support of the British in quelling an uprising in 1857 against British rule in India.
14. The removal of the camps was facilitated by the circulation in *Khampa* areas of a tape-recorded appeal by Tibet's spiritual and political leader, the Dalai Lama, urging their peaceful cooperation.
15. The expiration of the Nyishangte customs tax exemption and the granting of passports to all Nepali citizens hurt smaller scale Nyishangte traders whose small profits from trade ventures were thus made even smaller by having to pay customs and having to compete with members of other Nepali ethnic groups. But there were many Nyishangte living in Kathmandu who were already well on their way to being highly capitalized businessmen with established trade networks and diverse business interests beyond trade who were hurt less by the expiration of the group's special trade privileges.

16. U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia grew rapidly following the outbreak of the Vietnam War in 1964. U.S. troops in Vietnam peaked at roughly 500,000 personnel from 1967 to 1969, before withdrawing in 1973.
17. In a single incident that occurred in 1994, which I was told was not uncommon at the time, twenty-five Nyishangte street vendors were arrested in Kuala Lumpur. After serving a three-month prison term, they were deported and/ banned from entering Malaysia for five years. A Nyishangte man involved in this incident told me that he has not gone abroad for trade since his arrest and has no intention of ever returning to Malaysia, even though his five-year ban against entry had ended.
18. Between 1980 and 2000, the annual number of foreign tourists visiting Nyishang grew from 1,813 to 12,777. The 1980 data was taken from Satyal (2000:194), and the 2000 data was provided by the Manang field office of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project.
19. According to Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, the annual number of foreign tourists visiting Nepal nearly doubled during the 1990s, rising from 254,885 in 1990 to 463,646 in 2000.
20. At the time of my principal research in Manang in 2002, one U.S. dollar bought about 78 Nepali rupees.
21. Households grieving the death of a close relative are permitted to begin the harvesting of their crop fields a day earlier than other households, i.e. on the second day of *chi piba*.
22. For a description of a similar regulation of grass-cutting on communal lands by the residents of Ghunsa village in Nepal's Himalayan highland region of Kanchenjunga, see Brown (1999).
23. The only sale of land in Manang village to outsiders that I am aware of was the sale of a small plot of land to a Kathmandu-based non-governmental organization, the Himalayan Rescue Association, to build and operate a health post serving tourists, porters, and local residents, a transaction that stood to benefit, and thus was generally supported by, the entire community.
24. A similar aversion to selling land to outsiders was found by von Furer-Haimendorf (1975: 168) among highland communities in the Dolpo and Baaragaon regions of Nepal. Like in Manang, these regions have dry climates that force local residents to rely on cooperative systems of communal irrigation, a circumstance that discouraged the sale of land to outsiders who might not be as inclined to cooperate. I suspect that the prohibition against selling land in Manang to outsiders may have originated from similar concerns. Regardless of where it originated from, it has certainly served to preclude outsiders from being able to own or operate tourism businesses in Manang that would compete with those of local residents.
25. Killing wildlife has long been prohibited under Manang community rules. In this case, the offenders were apprehended by members of the Manang community, and an assembly consisting of one representative from each household of the community was gathered to determine their sentence.

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26. Since the historic use of rotating credit associations by groups living in Nepal's north-central highlands predates the monetization of their economies, grain was the original means of exchange employed. Although the use of money in rotating credit associations had become predominant by the early 1970s, grain and livestock were still being used in some areas of the north-central highlands as late as the early 1980s (Messerschmidt 1978:155, Vinding 1984:88).
27. If a *dhukuti* member without a sponsoring guarantor does not pay the installment due within one week after the round occurs, then the organizer is theoretically responsible for paying the late installment.
28. In micro-economics, the concept of Bertrand competition comes from a 19th century model of oligopoly competition developed by the French economist Joseph Louis Francois Bertrand (1883) as an alternative to an earlier model by Augustin Cournot. The Bertrand model demonstrates that when competitors of undifferentiated products compete on price alone, have sufficient capacity to meet demand, and cannot collude (explicitly as a cartel or implicitly by exploiting repeated play), then competition will lead to pricing at marginal cost, which means zero profit margins. To avoid or escape from this trap of aggressive price cutting, the competing parties must differentiate their products from their competitors' products (either physically or perceptibly through advertising), form a cooperative pricing cartel (with effective enforcement against cheating), create a situation of under-capacity relative to demand, or have lower cost than their competitors (see, for example, Tirole 1988).

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEPALESE STUDIES
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CUMULATIVE INDEX: VOLUME 23 – 30
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Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my colleague, Mr. Madhav Guragai, Assistant Documentation Officer at CNAS for his technical support.